



UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

School of Communication, Media and Theatre

Successful Masculinity
In Search of the Alpha Within

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Abstract

Pickup artists and the seduction community have gone from being an underground network of workshop and internet based teachers and students, to, following the publication of Neil Strauss' book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists', a movement entering the wider public consciousness, a subculture of (primarily) men who wish to get better at meeting, sleeping with, and dating women. They try to make the transformation from men who are not successful socially or with women, termed 'AFC's' or 'Average Frustrated Chumps' in the seduction community, to PUAs, or Pickup Artists. There are now seduction companies, TV shows, radio shows, podcasts, blogs, books, forums, websites, chat rooms, and community groups for major cities all across the world. This material is not always practiced or preached in a mainstream-safe way, but rather is done by breaking through groupthink, going against perceived norms, not being politically correct, and using the findings of evolutionary psychology and life coaching. The thinking behind this is: Everything can be taught, so why not how to get girls?

Game is (supposed to be) a fun, pleasurable way to improve your overall self: diet, exercise, hygiene, education, career, living circumstance, behavior, sociability – all are looked at towards bettering an overall enhanced version of yourself, almost quantifiable, to be the most optimal self you can be, where you are having a good life, and women are a part of that life, who may join you on your own individual journey as a man. An alpha.

The present thesis focuses on Strauss' book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists', highlights themes and issues which are pertinent for social and inter-relational reasons. Masculinity in postmodern hypercapitalist neoliberal western society is examined, through the prism of the text. The seduction community and its pickup techniques have not been examined adequately so far in academia, there is little research on the validity of the apparently successful routines and social dynamic structural mechanisms which pickup artists use to attract women.

Findings include the similarities in the ways that Game overlaps in some instances with social theories, better understandings of male-female interactions, and a more comprehensive picture of masculine dating and attraction rituals.

Keywords

game, pickup artistry, seduction community, attraction, hegemonic masculinity, dating, social dynamics, alpha, power, success, homosocialization, self-improvement

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the material and background for the present research. I give a broad history of Game, of the author Neil Strauss, the material to be analyzed and its context. Then I explain some of the aspects comprising Game. Following this, I give an account of my interest in the material and motivations for writing on this topic.

In this dissertation, I look at the socio-phenomenon of Game, using, primarily, Neil Strauss' book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists'. Other sources are used, when necessary, to provide context and explanation. To tackle the themes and issues that the text raises, I look through the prisms of various theorists, using, among others, the works of Bauman, Giddens, Kimmel and Kress. My analysis of the text is done using narrative analysis.

1.1 Background and Material

The seduction community is a group of men whose aim is to get better at meeting and seducing women. These pickup artists use a variety of tactics and gambits that are designed to increase the likelihood of a woman being attracted to them and sleeping with them. There are many 'schools' and companies who have differing approaches and styles in this arena.

The community started in the late 1980s with Ross Jeffries, who used some techniques designed by the US military to coerce prisoners of war to reveal secrets, and repurposed these techniques in order to lightly hypnotize women and get them attracted to him. These techniques use a form of hypnosis and 'brain programming', termed NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming. 'Rolling Stone' magazine did an article on Jeffries, he is considered one of the originators of modern pickup. Pickup coaches charge thousands of dollars for students to attend 'bootcamps' and seminars, where typically students will meet for a two or three day period, studying methods of seduction, theory, and then putting those to practice in 'the field', that is, any location where girls might be found, such as in shops, the street, libraries, college campuses, and mainly, in coffee shops, bars and nightclubs.

Mystery (aka Erik Von Markovik, aka Erik James Horvat-Markovic) in the late 1990s and early 2000s, discovered, created and implemented a systematized way to attract and seduce women, through countless nights and days of approaching them in his hometown of Toronto, Canada, seeing how interactions went, noticing underlying patterns emerging in interactions and social dynamics, and logically determining, over the course of a few years, what is effective and what is not, in maneuvers designed to make a woman attracted to a man. He, through trial and error, and observation of social behaviors, cues, seduction and attraction, categorized, decoded and implemented the techniques that work to make women attracted and seduced by men. This was groundbreaking, as it means you do not necessarily have to be famous, or good looking or rich to be successful, if you have the techniques learned and internalized. He went on online forums on the internet, where a secret group of underground pickup artists shared their field reports, experiences, new routines and theories in getting better at attracting women.

He created much, if not most, of the terminology that the seduction community uses as shorthand, and to covertly discuss pickup tactics in social settings. Apart from Ross Jeffries, Mystery can be credited with being among the first of the pickup gurus to conceptualize and monetize pickup as an area that can be taught and learned, combining economic and erotic capital. Ultimately, the goal is to improve one's life quality and circumstances, and with women, to be as good as a 'natural' or an 'alpha' male.

The seduction community also includes proponents who teach about other methods, which can be under the umbrella of seduction, or self-improvement, or life coaching in a holistic manner. The aim is to help men to reach their full potential. For instance, NLP, hypnosis, nutrition, yoga, meditation, health, gym practices and exercise, business advice, self-defense, and education/learning/book clubs, are all either off shoots, branches or complimentary to the community.

Neil Strauss published 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists' in 2005, and it immediately became a New York Times bestseller. In fact, it is among the most widely read books in modern times, the most stolen in bookshops and libraries worldwide. Strauss was approached by his editor, to write a book, a piece of investigative journalism, about the underground society of pickup artists.¹ Strauss was already a very successful writer, having

¹ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 8, 9 and p. 11. "It was never my intention to change my personality or walk through the world under an assumed identity. In fact, I was happy with myself and my life. That is, until an innocent phone call (it always starts with an innocent phone call) led me on a journey into one of the oddest and most exciting underground communities that, in more than a dozen years of journalism, I have ever come across. The call was from Jeremie Ruby-Strauss (no relation), a book editor who had stumbled across a document on the Internet called the layguide, short for The How-to-Lay-Girls Guide. Compressed into 150 sizzling pages, he said, was the collected wisdom of dozens of pickup artists who have been

written on culture for the 'New York Times' and 'Rolling Stone', among other publications. His books, prior to 'The Game', include ghostwritten (although with his name on the cover) and biographical exposés on Marilyn Manson, Jenna Jameson, and Motley Crue, all of them bestsellers. In addition, Strauss has appeared in a few music videos for artists such as Beck, and in the background, as a non-performer, in one of Jameson's movies. 'The Game' is not a how-to book, rather, it is a journey of self-discovery, of improvement of one's lot in life, and of uncovering some powerful lessons about society and social life, that most people do not know.

His writing style could be termed autoethnographic, or 'gonzo'. Gonzo journalism is thought to have originated with Hunter S. Thompson, and his book 'Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas', a style in which the journalist, in presenting his report, inserts himself into the story as a participant in what happened, documenting it simultaneously. Strauss' style is quite relatable and accessible, easy to read and witty. Strauss himself undergoes a transformation through writing and researching his book; as a man who was never good with women, he tries the seduction methods, mainly under the tutelage of Mystery, is named 'Style' by Mystery, and meets other PUAs, and related practitioners (who sometimes distance themselves from pickup artists) such as hypnotists, sexual healers and NLP 'speed seduction' guru Ross Jeffries, combines all of their teachings, to become crowned the 'world's best pickup artist' after consistently becoming extraordinarily good at picking up women. In this sense, it is a tale of 'rags to riches', or a hero (or, indeed super hero) mythic arc and journey. It gives hope to the everyman, especially those who are shy, alone, have low self-esteem, or were never popular in high school, or feel they never got their due, in comparison to 'naturals', those who are naturally good at Game without prior knowledge of the community or learned techniques.

The book states, on the inside publication and copyright information page, that: 'In order to protect the identity of some women and members of the community, the names and identifying characteristics of a small number of incidental characters in this book have been changed, and three minor characters are composites.'² He also states, in capital letters and bold writing, after quoting Dostoyevsky, and saying that, in his dedication, any girls he talked to in the last few years, he was not running Game on them, they were different (obviously in jest), that the book is a true story, it really happened, and the people in it are real. Thus, it is a type of autobiography, more than a how-to manual of how to seduce women or how to learn Game, although as a literary device, the book is structured as the main tenants in the Mystery Method are laid out, from selecting a Target, Approaching, to Closing, and so on. He includes a glossary of PUA/pickup terms at the end of the book, explaining abbreviations, acronyms and the concepts behind them. He finishes the page of his declaration of truth, with 'Don't hate the player, hate the game'.

Prefacing each new chapter, is a quote from a prominent feminist writer or academic, to add a counterweight to the male-centric views in the book. Strauss has said, that like Eminem in his approach to writing songs, Strauss tries, as much as possible, to 'critic-proof' his books, by seeing every possible angle of attack that could be made to the material, and addressing those concerns as such in the writing. He will thus attack himself and say so, before anyone else has the chance to, and in the process, anticipating those arguments and many times rendering them moot, invalid, pointless or irrelevant. To that end, the writing usually comes across as sincere, often explicit or expletive, yet only when necessary in portraying an honest account, open and brave, though with wit. He is willing to 'put [himself] out there'. The Dostoyevsky quote is in humility, and to 'cover all bases'. As are the quotes which precede each chapter, taken from the writings of prominent feminist authors.

In the process of writing the book, and submerging himself in the underground community of pickup artists, Strauss went by an alias – as do many other PUAs, in order to be incognito and private when writing 'field reports' or 'lay reports' on internet forums, the purpose of which is that readers can see how the person writing employed pickup and seduction techniques and perhaps learn from examples, or in an effort to reach out to the community and get advice on any technique sticking points which they may have. Strauss' alias as a PUA is/was 'Style'. He subsequently was named, a few years in a row, the world's best pickup artist.

exchanging their knowledge in newsgroups for nearly a decade, secretly working to turn the art of seduction into an exact science. The information needed to be rewritten and organized into a coherent how-to book, and he thought I was the man to do it. I wasn't so sure. I want to write literature, not give advice to horny adolescents. But, of course, I told him it wouldn't hurt to take a look at it. The moment I started reading, my life changed. More than any other book or document—be it the Bible, Crime and Punishment, or The Joy of Cooking—the layguide opened my eyes. And not necessarily because of the information in it, but because of the path it sent me hurtling down. When I look back on my teenage years, I have one major regret, and it has nothing to do with not studying hard enough, not being nice to my mother, or crashing my father's car into a public bus. It is simply that I didn't fool around with enough girls. I am a deep man—I reread James Joyce's Ulysses every three years for fun. I consider myself reasonably intuitive. I am at the core a good person, and I try to avoid hurting others. But I can't seem to evolve to the next state of being because I spend far too much time thinking about women. And I know I'm not alone. "What I discovered was an entire community filled with [...] men who claimed to have found the combination to unlock a woman's heart and legs – along with thousands of other like myself, trying to learn these secrets. The difference was that these men had broken down their methods to a specific set of rules that anybody could apply. And each self-proclaimed pickup artist had his own set of rules."

² Strauss. N. 2005. The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists.

One can argue, that the timing was right for such a book, as the internet was in full swing for over a decade, people could meet and communicate directly on it in real time, self-help was beginning to be less stigmatized and ‘spiritual’, sexuality was continuing on its liberal path, helped with more lenient laws and politics, and porn, to name three factors, and a people ever more hungry to live ‘the good life’. The courting culture in the west, particularly in America, was ready to be optimized, as more knowledge and technology (in terms of techniques and language, and in terms of machines that communicate) was ready for an upheaval, by people shrewd enough to capitalize on it, and also, daring enough to implement the Game’s teachings. They, as in the film ‘The Matrix’, and as existent on a popular reddit.com subforum, were ready to swallow the ‘Red Pill’, and see reality – in this case, male/female dynamics – as they really are, and instead of giving up, using that knowledge to their benefit. A revenge of the nerds, at least, initially, and those people ‘brave’ enough to see things as they really are, and as they could be in their personal lives.

Other factors that may have made (and continue to make) the book (and community) a success, apart from the allure of the ‘ordinary man’ to possessing ‘extraordinary talents’ with women, without benefit or need for physical attractiveness, riches or fame, include three of the most popular/fashionable ideologies in current use, which revolve around neoliberal thinking, ‘genetics’ (for lack of a better term) and computer science – in the sense that their logic and language is pervasive and acceptable in the west, almost as common sense. None of these is in itself/alone the ultimate understanding of human nature and society, despite their scientific grounding, however, it often happens in discourse that any reality that is not strictly under the domain originally covered by these scientific models is at risk of being inadequately reduced to/into these models. Also relevant is evolutionism. For example, computer science speaks to our need for efficiency and quantification. Thus, narratives using metaphors based on these sciences/scientific models can be aided in their quest for popularity, if they can use existing ‘mental shortcuts’ or ‘cultural memes’, while offering models of coherence or instruction/guidance in a fragmented world. So too, is the trendiness of positive thinking and mindfulness life philosophies, conducive to the reception of material or practices which may be beneficial in the optimization of other areas of life, such as courtship and seduction, including some modes of thought or behavior that serve to cover the failure of neoliberal politics. In this sense, Strauss has, in American political terms, elements of both Right wing conservatism, and Left wing liberalism.

Although mainstream narrative and opinion of this sociocultural phenomenon is either disbelieving or derisive, people within the seduction community believe that that they are about personal development, about becoming a “better person”, through personal development practices.

The book has many forms or modalities simultaneously, available as audiobook, with supplementary material in video and text form on Strauss’ websites (Stylelife and NeilStrauss.com). Due to time and space constraints, I will focus solely on Strauss’ book, and leave examination of the wider seduction community, structured game, practices and its reception and place in the world, to occasional comments within the dissertation. Themes of compulsive heterosexuality, hegemonic masculinity, success, and social dynamics, are prevalent. Attractiveness as a (often subjective, but not always the case) concept, shall not be discussed, neither shall aesthetics.

1.2 Some Aspects of Game

Game can be viewed as a way by its teachers to make self-help acceptable to men. To do more than sit on the sofa and play WoW (World of Warcraft) online, to do more than retreat from the emasculating facets of their lives. Game is seen by some as a form of self-expression. A way for men to approach women that they may otherwise, through false beliefs, groupthink, mainstream brainwashing, or low self-esteem, have deemed themselves unworthy or unable of approaching. It aims, through the art of cold-approach pickup, to face men’s own fears, (often called AA or Approach Anxiety, and complete with a socio-evolutionary explanation as to where that fear of approach comes from) and thus to work on them, and improve their lives holistically, most noticeably in terms of the women that they date, but overall in terms of their quality of life, mental, physical and emotional existence. Pickup puts a spotlight on one’s own issues and insecurities, so that if you want to get better you *have* to work on improving or changing them.

Game forces you to look at and examine yourself, if done properly. Other aspects of Game include minimizing time spent watching porn, video games, it promotes reading of books, socializing, getting your life together, getting fit and healthy, having a good grooming and hygienic routine, being independent yet networking and making friends, and so on, to evolve into a mastery not only of dating tactics, but of business and of life. To have a qualitatively and quantitatively better existence.

Romance is a relatively recent construct, and not suitable for attracting women, according to PUAs. Being a nice guy, or a romantic, does not impress women, no matter how much they may say it does. What women say and what they mean

are different things, as many PUAs are want to repeat, and Kimmel³ fails to take this behavior into his lamentation of men's behavior. Being nice is a false construct, according to PUAs, perpetuated through rom com and sitcom movies, series, novels and songs, which women in real life do not respond to. Women are often unaware of what really attracts them, and so 'nice guy' is often what they say they want, but not what they respond to emotionally, physically, or sexually. Game and seduction techniques address this, and attempt to correct this, so that men who are not wealthy or traditionally good looking, but who may be good guys and worthy of female attention, can have a chance at attracting women of their choice.

Good Game not only improves a man's sexual and social life, it also improves his inner life. Any misfires he may have socially can be symptomatic of unresolved issues internally in his mind or emotions. Even if a man is in a long term relationship, due to the liminality and fragmentation that is postmodernity, and the lack of personal investment that people have in their personal and romantic relationships, it is prudent and advisable for men to keep their Game and pickup skills tight and honed, as they never know when their current relationship will end. Accordingly, PUA mentors advocate proactive mentalities, and avoid being passive, so that your 'genes' will not be 'betrayed' and can continue.

Social robots are pickup artists, who get great results utilizing their techniques of seduction in real life, but who never seem to have actual girlfriends, a life outside the Community, or a personality. This is the so called 'dark side' of Game. The students in the book often mimic Mystery and Style's mannerisms, and dress. Social robots, according to Strauss, see most women as potential conquests, most men as competition, rely only on pre-developed methods of pickup, and socialize only by using rules and theories learned via the seduction community. Normally, PUAs eventually internalize these techniques in an approximation of the way a 'natural' would behave. Personal development is still needed after these techniques have been internalized. Social robots show how structured game and pickup artistry can turn from self-help to a videogame type of competition. Game shows a culmination of sorts in the interest in proper methods and techniques for making sexual approaches to women, yet those men that strictly adhere to structured game often amounts to nothing more than the video or role player game competition. On the positive side, it enables these often lonely and emasculated men to navigate uncertain areas in social life, with a type of structure, map and guidance of what to do. There can be elements of homosociality to aspects of these social robots' behavior, those who compete with other AFCs or PUAs, live in all-male pickup/seduction 'lairs', discuss tactics and approaches, and get as excited about making, writing and recounting field reports, as in having sex with women. Also, there can be an imbalance if they have not worked on their inner Game, due to them getting the bulk of their esteem and validation through women, or just the people in their lair.

Natural Game (not to be confused with 'Direct Game') is a method that has grown more popular in the past few years – it is a more free-flowing, improvisational approach to seduction, focusing on developing fundamental skills such as connecting with women on an emotional level, communicating authentically, building a solid 'inner game' – that is esteem, thought processes, motivations and similar aspects. Natural Game still uses some scripted routines, depending on the situation.

Self-help/personal development/lifestyle coaching is a more recent trend in the pickup community, where companies such as RSD have different videos, subcommunities and groups to discuss and disseminate information on bodybuilding and fitness, business, lifestyle elements, book recommendations, and the like. This is viewing self-improvement more holistically, using Game as one avenue from which to branch out into others, and seeing Game itself as a way to challenge themselves, preconceived mental notions, to grow and to learn.

Inner game, as mentioned, considers personal development, inner beliefs, core values and life goals. In contrast, Outer Game is technique and practice based. Inner and Outer Game complement each other. The idea is that through learning how to seduce women, these men become more confident, sociable, attractive, positive, and better people⁴. Strauss, after the publication of 'The Game', told one reporter that teaching Game does some good in the world, it helps to make awkward men more social, find more happiness, and may help prevent acts of violence or other outbursts. Men are taught to be 'congruent' with their new personality traits, otherwise, if being too much like 'social robots' and pretending/acting like a confident guys – eventually that mask has to come off, if the lessons have not been absorbed well enough. Or, the woman will begin to see through it. When that happens the woman feels lied to and manipulated. These men give pickup a bad name, many PUAs feel.

The teaching aspects of pickup is propagated and maintained through an ideal notion of helping other frustrated men. There is a noble and just cause slant to much of the material, and its justification. Helping those men who are lost in the postmodern sexual discourse, and to realize his potential among sanitized and politically correct climate, is what pickup

³ Kimmel, M. 2008.

⁴ Netburn, D. 2005. [Strauss to reporter] "If I can boost someone's self-esteem, help him get a girlfriend for the first time in his life and keep him from opening fire in a supermarket because of his frustrations, then I'm doing something good in the world."

companies offer, when they provide their material. These 'AFC's or average frustrated chumps feel victimized by the normative dating practices, and pickup techniques learned through study and days and nights of 'sarging', that is, approaching women that they do not previously know, also known as 'cold approach pickup', can lead to alleviation of this victim mindset and feeling, through success with women that they sleep with, befriend, date or marry.

Pickup artistry spotlights the male's performance in the ritual of courting. This includes, among others, practices such as avatar building, demonstrations of higher value (DHVs), creating an emotional connection, "negging", and so on. These position the aspiring PUA in the best light in the woman's eyes and estimation, increasing the likelihood that she will become attracted to him. This removes any 'need' for alcohol as a persuasive or social agent, so that both the PUA and his 'target', the woman, can still maintain responsibility. Also, there is a focus on HBs (Hot Babes, often described numerically, with HB10 being the most desirable and beautiful, and the type of woman that the Mystery Method is expressly designed to attract)) as the 'targets' to 'open' (that is approach), when 'sarging' (that is, the act of going out in field, usually with other PUAs, with the explicit intention of picking up girls) usually between the ages of 18 – 25, after this, they are not seen as so attractive, or evolutionarily viable, and their value begins to decrease.

Most 'true' pickup artists are polyamorous, and so have open relationships, multiple relationships, or casual relationships. This, they feel, is more 'natural' in an evolutionary sense, and an appropriate, rational and realistic response to romantic and sexual relationships in postmodernity.⁵ PUAs are encouraged to be forthright and honest about their intentions upfront with regard to this, so that they will 'manage expectations' of the woman, and so that their Game credo of 'leave her better than you found her' will remain intact. To alleviate AA or Approach Anxiety in AFCs, PUA instructors often remind them that the women who they see in high energy venues such as bars or clubs are usually there looking for potential suitors. Indeed, through learning pickup and approaching women, it is thought by the seduction community that men are improving the seduction and courtship arena and experience for women.⁶ If the aspiring PUA fails at attracting the girl, it is seen, within the community, as either being his fault, or that the woman may not want him at that particular time. It is discouraged to call women derogatory names, as those 'bitchy' behaviors are generally interpreted as a socially calibrated and learned response, by attractive women, to being approached often, and it is their defensive shield, and a test for more 'worthy' men to pass.

There are many paradoxes inherent in Game, such as taking women off a pedestal, the one that mainstream society and romantic fiction places them on, yet spending an inordinate amount of time learning techniques in order to get better at meeting and seducing them, and remove the vagueness of 'hooking up'. In the process, as in mainstream society, the burden of the interaction and the responsibility lies with men. However, in a counteractive balance measure, successful pickup usually is deemed to be elegant and 'on point' when the man, through Game, gets the woman attracted to, and chasing him. The least amount of investment on his part, and the most on hers, ensures this. Undoubtedly, the man still has to be the one to initially approach and flip all of the attraction switches that the woman has. Due to Game being discovered however, these are not a mysterious set of indeterminates and unquantifiables, but rather necessitates performing Game well, going through the phases or stages correctly, and getting the girl attracted. Still, from both sexes there are elements of performance and deception, as they pretend not to care, though knowing what both want. Sexual freedom and liberation is not to be confined within marriage or even relationships, and is quickly becoming normative, and an end goal itself.

Day Game and Night Game refer to the times of day, and types of venue or location, that the pickup artist 'sarges' in. Day Game is usually lower key, and can be more direct. It can happen anywhere, such as the street, cafes, shops and campuses. Night Game requires statements and gestures of disinterest, and is more high energy, to match people's mood and the environment, which is usually a bar or a night club.

1.3 Autoethnographic Statement

Initially I read Neil Strauss work through artist profiles and reviews he wrote for Rolling Stone magazine. I read his book 'The Long Hard Road Out Of Hell' which was released in 1998, an (auto)biography of the metal singer Marilyn Manson (billed as Marilyn Mason with Neil Strauss). The books' writing and style was captivating, it was raw, uncensored, immediate, at times gonzo-like, and the format was not usual. There were illustrations, digressions, photos, excerpts from letters and diaries which broke up the book into easily digestible pieces – perfect for postmodern short attention spans. In addition, the writing was humorous and accessible, which made the subject matter much more relatable, and enjoyable. It also featured Manson's writing and journalism, as well as fan reactions to on stage antics.

⁵ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 414.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 166. "...if a guy wants to improve his odds of meeting women, he's going to have to make some changes to himself. And it just so happens that all the qualities women look for in guys are good things. I mean, I've become more confident. I started working out and eating healthier. I'm getting in touch with my emotions and learning more about spirituality. I've become a more fun, positive person."

The book incorporates illustrations from a public domain medical book, also throughout the pages are documents of such things as girlfriends, legal documents of claims made by the American Family Association about his shows that were proven to be false, all combining to keep the text interesting and vibrant, postmodern and culturally relevant.

When I saw the cover of the book 'The Game', I was interested initially due to Strauss being the writer and my appreciation of his style. Upon learning of the subject matter, I became more intrigued. I noticed the book having some formatting similarities with the Manson book, such as drawings and illustrations, interruptions in various chapters with different font and perspectives, even writings from different people and internet forums. The chapters were mostly short, and the writing style gonzo-like, lending the work an air of authenticity and honesty, as the piece can be viewed as an ethnographic account of the author's experiences in and amongst the seduction community. The writing was very accessible to me, captivating, and mostly humorous. I 'got' it, and was laughing at almost every page, due to the experiences being recounted, the wit, the sarcasm, and the relatability of the material.

The relatability of Game and of Strauss' experiences, in particular his mindset before and during these experiences, spurred me to contemplate investigating the notion and subcultural practices of Game. The subject matter is ripe and suitable for social scientific investigation, as it concerns human interaction – by which both pickup artists and social scientists are fascinated. The idea that one can learn, in a logical, systematic, methodical and practical model-based manner, the ability to attract women, was, to me as a heterosexual man, and as a social sciences student, very compelling. In a sense, Game is revenge of the nerds, or a democratizing endeavor, not just for men to one-up women, who in all ways have actually invented the 'field' and 'habitus' of Game through the past ten thousand years of human social interaction, but for men who do not have good looks, good genetics, financial wealth or social status in life, to actually be equal when it comes to dating, happiness, sexual fulfilment and life satisfaction, with men who are naturally or through good fortune, endowed with these attributes. This egalitarian potential, as well as the positivity of facilitating a 'best self' for people to live up to their potential and often exceed it, through how-to and self-help material, teachers and a community sharing insights and information, encouraged me both personally and academically.

I have personally always enjoyed the company of women, romantically, sexually and platonically. The techniques of the Game, when thought of in retrospect to 'successes' in my past before I knew about it, and when learned and applied to recent and current life situations, do work. This personal confirmation of Game, and witnessing others who I have met and befriended, enabled me to consider researching Game as a concept, social movement and social disruptive force. By 'disruptive', I mean in the sense of upturning received and common wisdoms embedded in the mainstream narrative by the majority of the western population, regarding equality of the sexes, what is 'right', what is 'moral', what men are 'supposed' to do to be with women, how men should 'just be nice' and 'just know' and it 'just happens'. Game, being legitimized not only through anecdotal and documented accounts of successes by men with women, but also through scientific research on genes, evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, memetics, social psychology and group theory (including related research on polyamory and alternate lifestyles) clearly flies in the face of such 'wisdom', and presents a more sober view of reality than the mainstream narrative, Disney or romantic comedies will have you believe.

The feminist (over)reaction to Game, along with knee-jerk reactions of media and laypeople, further encouraged me to investigate and want to legitimate, or see what is legitimate in the other side of the story that is misrepresented: That Game works, that there is nothing inherently morally 'wrong' with practicing it, that ideally it is a bettering of a person not at the expense but at the benefit of another, and that it presents reality as it is, more so than a lot of the mainstream discourse. Game warrants a proper and deep analysis and understanding.

My ideas for this dissertation were large and all-encompassing. Due to limiting time restrictions and the realization that this is indeed a Master's thesis, I narrowed my focus to what led me how to discover Game initially, and what made me become even more interested in human social dynamics, interaction, attraction between the sexes, masculinity, and expanding one's own potential: the Neil Strauss book 'The Game'.

In this chapter I have given a brief history of Game, talked about Neil Strauss and his book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Underground Pickup Artists', and explained some of the concepts behind Game. I then gave an account of how and why I became interested in Strauss' writings, the book, and Game itself.

In the next chapter, I state the questions of this dissertation, outline the main goals of the research, and discuss prior research on the topic.

2. Goals and Research Question

In this chapter, I state the research question and auxiliary questions of the dissertation. Then, I state my goals for the research and what I hope to achieve, positioning my ontological viewpoint. After this, I outline prior research on the topic of Game.

2.1 Research Question

In what ways does Neil Strauss use and show a successful and powerful masculinity status in the dating arena with women, in his book “The Game”?

2.2 Auxiliary Questions and Sub-Auxiliary Questions

- (a) How are the norms of successful masculinity constructed in the text?
- (b) What is the author/his character at the end of the narrative? What kind of product/entity is he?
- How is masculinity defined through liminal struggles in the seduction community and ‘The Game’?
- What are the gender roles and identifications most prevalent in the seduction community and ‘The Game’?
- In what way does the success of ‘The Game’ indicate the disenfranchisement of men in postmodern neoliberal western culture?
- To what extent is masculinity hardwired by evolution, or performed and taught, as evinced in ‘The Game’?
- An evaluation of the success of gonzo journalism and autoethnography in ‘The Game’.

My goals, especially in light of the recent Julien Blanc scandal, are to show that learning Game, and Game itself, is not a threat or disservice to women, nor to men. Also, I wish to investigate the qualities which are valued in Strauss’ book, the reasons why his pursuit of Game knowledge is seen as worthwhile and heroic, within the context of the story told in the book.

What some of the articles that I examine illustrate, at least in those articles that are, or are based on evolutionary psychology and biology, and on the merging of social sciences with ‘hard’ science, is that the techniques in Game that are successful, no matter how ‘politically incorrect’, are based on provable, intrinsically valid, female dynamics, in order to be effective. These men become ‘authentic’ men by learning how women actually relate to them on every level; from sociological to psychological, from evolutionary perspectives to the underlying biology that motivates women’s behaviors not only sexually, but emotionally, pragmatically and sympathetically. There are self-help and life improvement mechanisms behind these teachings. Furthermore, these men who learn Game, learn in their understanding the nature of women, and how women solipsistically and subconsciously institute their own Game socially and psychologically to ensure optimizing hypergamy to their best benefit.

On the macro level, this is beneficial in that these men can then leverage that understanding to not only to improve their own lives, but also the lives of other men, their sons, their brothers, and the lives of the women they involve themselves with, under the credo found within Game of ‘Leave her better than when you found her’.

The book and large part of the seduction community’s shows a genuineness and honesty, where conversation and emotion are engaged in by having the blinders removed that a feminized acculturation, conditioning, groupthink and political correctness has fitted them with for the better part of a lifetime. They choose the ‘Red Pill’, an image in the movie ‘The Matrix’, which is often cited in pickup terminology and represents learning and accepting the ‘truth’ of what is hidden in social conditioning and behavior, that which is not realized or spoken of. (The mainstream thought, is referred to as ‘Blue Pill’ thought). In doing so, they go against – or even defy – mainstream thought, by not “buying into” what a feminine-centric culture tells them they should adopt and internalize in order for women to love them.

If men can be honest, communicative, and authentic, they will have great relationships, so goes the conventional wisdom. Yet how a man comes to being honest with himself after shedding his ‘blue pill programming’, how he learns

women ‘actually’ communicate, and how he becomes ‘authentic’ after having internalized Game-awareness and red pill truth, is a much different prospect than telling men to “just be themselves” and trust in the alleged rationality, equality and zero-sum goodness inherent in ‘most’ women and romantic advice, today.

Another goal is to show that self-improvement is actually something that all people should be involved in, free of shame. Game and the seduction community, again on the macro level, and without getting into a discussion of the monetary and business reasons behind various guru’s and seduction companies’ promotion and methods and conduct, encourage a holistic improvement and focus on the lives of men, in order to help them, and in a reverb effect, help society as a whole. Structured Game, until the increasing popularity of the company Real Social Dynamics in the last couple of years and its emphasis on ‘Natural Game’, especially through their videos on YouTube (which have increasingly become infused with psychology and self-help in general) has been the main form of Game taught and learned, made popular through Mystery’s VH1 reality TV series ‘The Pickup Artist’, his books, and, initially, Strauss’ book ‘The Game’.

To tackle these themes and issues, I shall look through the prisms of various theorists, using, among others, the works of Bauman, Giddens, Kimmel and Kress.

The questions of this dissertation are broad in scope and deeply probing. Due to work economic reasons, I tackled various parts of the book ‘The Game’ with different levels of analysis, focusing on the elements that the questions entailed.

There is a deep analysis of approximately half of the book, using a form of narrative analysis, and links to the theories outlined in Chapter Three. This analysis finds meanings and aspects which apply to the book as a whole.

The second half of the book is examined through the research question and auxiliary questions, also referencing the theorists discussed in Chapter Three, with a lighter use of narrative analysis.

I approached the material in this way, to avoid saturation of materials.

2.3 Prior Research

There has not been much academic research on Game, or on the seduction community in general. This might be due to it emerging relatively recently into mainstream consciousness in the last ten years. Or, it may be due to the controversial nature of the subject matter, and academics may shy away from potentially politically incorrect practices or behavior models considered faux pas, which challenge mainstream accepted thought.

In examining previous academic research for this dissertation, due to time and space constraints, I have limited myself to reviewing academic writings directly on or concerning the seduction community, pickup, pickup artists, social dynamics, ‘dating’ and ‘game’ itself. I have had to omit most articles on dating, courtship, romance, human mating, ‘hooking up’, gender, ‘players’, masculinity, communities, subcultures, evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology and related fields. Of these, again due to constraints, I shall choose the most pertinent articles.

When starting to gather research materials for this dissertation, I came across a Bachelor’s Degree thesis⁷ by a student, Tonis Jurgens, in Tallinn University, perhaps the academic work most close in theme and content to my own. It deals with Neil Strauss’ book ‘The Game’, talks about the seduction community, explains some pickup terms and techniques, including some of the origins and genesis of concepts and the cultural formation. He contrasts Strauss’ book with Michael Kimmel’s ‘Guyland’, a semi-academic/pop-social book by the sociologist. I look at this book in more detail in Chapter 3. Theory. Jurgens’ thesis explains pickup, its attendant terms, and some general reasoning and theories behind the various methods. Interestingly, he talks on pickup as, in part, being an accumulation of erotic capital. He sides with Kimmel’s⁸ view of both Game and its practitioners as being somehow unfair or unequal. His thesis has the lofty goals of asking how and why the seduction community has come into existence, who its members are, what their practices consist of, and how they related to normative practices of courtship in America, while recounting theories on compulsive heterosexuality by Pascoe, the heterosexual matrix and performative gender practices by Butler, hegemonic masculinity by Connell et al, the hegemony of men by Hearn, and sexual capital by Green et al. Overall, his thesis provides a short historical-analytic overview of some parts of the formation of the seduction community, claiming that the formation was influenced by twentieth century sexual liberalism, affected by discourse on sexuality during the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the self-help industry in the 1970s, and the market for (auto)biographical self-improvement guidebooks, as discussed by Sassoon.

The discourse on sexuality has been infused with discourse on the seduction and discourses on pickup/game, like layers.

⁷ Jurgens, T. 2012. Pickup Artistry as a Sociocultural Formation.

⁸ Kimmel, M. 2008.

Jurgens mentions the rise of the American middle class as having influenced the popularity of Game. I would disagree, as after the publication of 'The Game', the 2008 economic recession hit America and worldwide, and has resulted in the weakening and continued erosion of the middle class, while Game has been increasing in popularity year on year.

Jurgens plays into the 'White Knight' feminist-approved mode in his conclusion, of naysaying pickup artistry as a form of misogyny, of men's domination over women and other men. This is an easy, and, I believe, false trope to espouse. He links the PUA community with compulsive heterosexuality, yet sidesteps the issue of the marginalization and failed 'techniques' or practices of men who would try to be on women's better side by pleasing them, but who ultimately fail and are resented by women, themselves, and other men, and who can use pickup as a way out of their social exile and a means to a better life, whereby the people they meet will be enriched by meeting them, and vice versa, in a win-win solution.

Jurgens also claims that the commercialization of sexuality and the resultant frustration it caused in men leads them to seek out the seduction community, and propagate misogynistic behavior, and domination of women and subjugation of lesser men, while he also unreasonably criticizes the community for not 'fixing' the problems of/in modern courtship or social dynamics, despite the community offering solutions that can bring confidence and happiness. Again, this is a simplified and overgeneralized argument he uses, and perhaps too neat, in expecting mainstream courtship to be 'remedied' by revolutionary PUAs, although not explicitly stated. On hegemonic masculinity, however, being a normative arrangement, when discussing particular clusters of men, I am in agreement.

Trying to be the alpha male is not easy. Socially, and evolutionarily, the alpha is the one who is most successful, in life, with women, in health, and holistically. To aim towards being alpha, appropriating alpha behavior, mimicking it, absorbing it and internalizing it, one can become alpha, or close to it, and can be more successful with women. This is the goal of people who study, and practice pickup, along with the obvious pleasures of being able to choose from a range of attractive females, achieving their biological imperative as men, and gaining recognition socially, financially, professionally, and culturally. To be a 'natural' (a man who is naturally good at Game/seducing women, he has not had to learn it systematically) and an 'alpha', one must refrain from being too much of a 'nice guy', refute overtly feminizing influences, be a little less sensitive and considerate, yet empathic, reject complicit masculinity, and instead not shy away from your own, or the woman's, inherent sexual energy. One must break out of one's 'comfort zone', and grow. This certain strata of a minority of men, to whom men turn or cower, and to whom women are attracted, are the alphas.

Hendriks⁹ has an article for the University of Mannheim in Germany, an ethnographic research of an international community of dating coaches, which was published by Cultural Analysis, a journal connected to UC Berkeley, where he writes on self-help discourse, hedonistic goals, and innerworldly asceticism, focusing on the ascetic tendencies of the seduction community. Hendrik's writes about coaches in the seduction community who teach men how to attract and seduce sexually attractive women, as being linked in theme and mode to disciplinarian and ascetic values, in spite of the hedonistic goal of sexual conquest. The discourse and practices of the seduction community, as an international self-help movement¹⁰, are filled with these values, similar to Weber's work ethic, in a diffused and fragmented form, and applied to the postmodern dating scene.

In the paper, Hendriks cites a variety of sources, many of which are posts on online forums on seduction community websites such as the RSD forum, videos, theories on self-help (including Foucault's 'Technologies of the Self'), Weber, and the books written by Mystery and Neil Strauss. Hendriks approaches the seduction community through the prism of the wider self-help movement, which in the 21st century has grown exponentially in content covered, in production and in consumption.¹¹ The paper underlines the emphasis that the seduction community has on self-discipline and critical self-observation, and that people are capable of and indeed should change and transform themselves. This is the premise of self-help teachings, and the direction to which self-help practices are geared towards; that is, people want to better

⁹ Hendriks, E. C. 2012. Ascetic Hedonism: Self and Sexual Conquest in the Seduction Community.

¹⁰ *ibid.* "In the Seduction Community, dating coaches [...] teach [...] conversation skills and body language techniques, as well as psychological strategies [...] to produce an inner state of self-confidence. The gurus furthermore advocate values, lifestyles and worldviews that they consider useful when it comes to transforming oneself into an [...] attractive and seductive individual [such as a] "pickup artist," a master of the "Venusian arts." "The Seduction Community is a specific set of related schools in Western popular culture." "Besides [the] larger schools [and companies associated] [...] there are all kinds of less distinct seduction schools and methods, many smaller dating advice companies, and a number of celebrated freelance dating coaches..." "The ideas and approaches propagated by members of the Seduction Community vary widely. Some gurus and schools encourage the use of "canned material" — that is, rehearsed, status-conveying stories that are thrown into conversations to make a strong impression—whereas others advocate "natural game," which involves a more spontaneous way of interacting. Some put the emphasis on learning specific strategies, whereas others stress the value of enhancing one's psychological strength or "inner game," arguing that attractive behavior flows naturally from a state of self-confidence and emotional stability."

¹¹ *ibid.* "...contemporary self-help covers everything from advice on career advancement, relationships, happiness and spiritual growth to more specific topics such as dieting and dating." "...self-help groups and movements range from secular fan clubs to (semi-)religious cults; and from peer to-peer mutual-aid groups to loosely knit movements revolving around a charismatic self-help guru, a bestselling publication, or a popular advice blog."

themselves. Such transformations include financially, sexually, socially, spiritually, and a myriad of others, and advice is found in books, websites, videos, audio files and training programs.

Self-help provides a vocabulary for the self, and one's perceptions of social relations, according to Hendriks. People and groups are changed through self-help by altering the way they view themselves and others, and their position in society, so that self-help exerts a socio-cultural influence even if the expected or advertised changes do not happen in the precise way as intended.¹² Groups or communities can evolve, as they reinterpret the means of help, going further or more distant from initial goals and quests, and see the journey of self-improvement as a goal in itself. A mixture of hedonism and self-discipline is reached, where the hedonistic desires of more financial, physical, and social capital and power combine with the ascetic focus on the rigor, motivation and self-control necessary to bring about such results. This, claims Hendriks, is central to the seduction community, which, although at first look, seems like a hedonistic movement without morals, one where the primary goal is sexual intercourse with many attractive women, and a commercially oriented one, with gurus as businessmen, groups/schools as companies, and students as consumers, it also has many other facets that are not considered by the mainstream discourse or thought – ascetic components such as significant self-discipline needed to seduce and attract women in a strategic way. Hendriks likens these ascetic components in the seduction community to Weber's conceptualization of work ethic (which was instrumental to the 'spirit of capitalism'), albeit in a fragmented and diffused expressive way. He argues that this work ethic of asceticism drives the hedonism contained within the seduction community, which also simultaneously drives the work ethic/asceticism of self-control and determination, the two forces compliment and aid one another.¹³

Hendriks mentions the pseudonyms and monikers that gurus and students use in the seduction community, as a way to protect anonymity¹⁴ to a degree, and also to signal the aim of becoming a new person. This enables generation of excitement of belonging to an underground movement. The power structure of the seduction community is described, which is top-down when considering the dissemination of products and teachings, but horizontal when taking into account the sharing of seduction and dating knowledge by non-professionals on internet forums or chat groups, which are non-commercial. Students of Game meet in cities, to discuss Game or go on nights out sarging, or live together in 'lairs' in cities worldwide. The unity in the community, despite the differing ideas and approaches, is due to the shared terminology, vocabulary and language, thus producing common values and outlooks on life, writes Hendriks. Students mix and match concepts from the different schools, in general.

Hendriks goes on to describe meetings with lairs that he attended, in particular local German lairs, detailing practicing doing 'day game', 'street game' and 'night game' with the members, in an ethnographic style. A weekend bootcamp in Frankfurt Germany that Hendriks attended, where professional pickup coaches taught students, in this case Julien Blanc from RSD (Real Social Dynamics), the Los Angeles based dating company, is also described, in particular the 'drilling' to get students out of their 'comfort zones' and to break their 'social conditioning' that inhibits their approaching women who they do not already know. Accordingly, there is a disciplinary element evident, showing the ascetic values behind the hedonism. Hendriks main point is that underneath the 'rewards' of learning Game in the seduction community, there is a creed and necessary subscription to endurance, self-discipline, hard work, immunizing oneself to rejection, self-criticism, endless self-improvement, sacrifices, and an abstinence from 'naive romanticism' – social life and intimacy is rationalized.¹⁵

This is needed when a shift of self, perception and lifestyle occurs, with the (ultimate) goal of empowerment through transformation of the self, worldview, lifestyle, behavior and understanding. Social interactions in the seduction community are objectified and rationalized, and lose much of their leisurely and fun qualities, writes Hendriks, causing the lines between recreational socializing and work to blur.¹⁶ The asceticism is present (though not in an actual religious sense, as the seduction community is in general quite secular) where rewards are removed from the present to the future, and any pleasurable happenings or pain from rejections in the present are not to be focused on, such as direct and

¹² *ibid.* "[self-help] can cause people to adopt a new self-understanding and lifestyle that centers on an ideal of self-improvement through self-discipline. Interestingly, in the case of the most dedicated self-helpers, the initial promise of (quick) results and the real identity changes self-helpers undergo often come to intertwine in a highly complex fashion." "...hedonistic attainment of financial, social, erotic or romantic success no longer constitutes the only envisioned end goal, but rather become part of a larger attempt to reach a state of empowerment and excellence through an ascetic focus on self-discipline."

¹³ *ibid.* "The search for sexual enjoyment intertwines with the quest for self-perfection and empowerment through self-discipline and voluntary suffering."

¹⁴ *ibid.* "often it is also simply a way to post on seduction without one's real name being linked to a controversial self-help movement on Internet search engines." "However, as the movement entered the mainstream media and subsequently became a steady source of income to a number of top dating coaches linked to a handful of larger dating advice companies, some dating coaches began to use their real names again. For example, the prominent coaches Jlaix and Tyler Durden once again became Jeff Allen and Owen Cook."

¹⁵ *ibid.* "The more involved he becomes with the Seduction Community, the more a student's system of self-discipline will take priority in his practice. The reason for this shift is that adhering to a system of self-discipline is intimately connected to the formation of a certain lifestyle, self-understanding and worldview that is often purported to effect an empowering transformation of the self."

¹⁶ *ibid.* "the man who fully embraces the Venusian arts feels obliged to convey status, to employ his techniques, to constantly examine himself critically, and to harden himself to countless harsh rejections by women—all while not falling back on the "liquid courage" offered by drinking alcoholic beverages. The Venusian artist therefore requires a high work ethic."

immediate successes with women, or a fascination or 'love' with a particular woman. Emotional detachment from such interactions is key. The petty concerns and dramas of 'the masses' are to be avoided, for a more enlightened way of being and thinking. The ascetic suffering is present in the removal of emotions, the objectification of the self and social architecture, and letting go of many elements of the self, past behaviors and 'bad' habits, in order to undergo a deep identity change.

Pain is believed to be conducive to growth, therefore one must step out of one's comfort zones as much as possible, no matter how alien, potentially embarrassing or disorienting.¹⁷ One must constantly seek out challenges. The avoidance of seriousness in pickup situations when trying to seduce women, yet the necessity or willingness of undergoing discomfort and pain in order to grow, is an ever-present paradox. It is strategically advantageous to project happiness when interacting with women, however, if this is not being actually felt by the PUA, the most important thing is to keep on working. A way to authentic masculinity, control over one's destiny, is the real goal aimed at, sleeping with beautiful women is one part of the path into this transformation. These 'technologies of the self' give self-help practitioners the tools to turn themselves into a new type of subject, one that is closer to the ideals of perfection and empowerment, couched in sociobiological and evolutionary psychology understandings of humanity. Naturally, there are varying levels and forms of commitment to such practices, ideas and engagements by students in the seduction community. Some dive in wholeheartedly, while others take a more disconnected and relaxed approach, or just sample some of the material out of interest.¹⁸ Gurus and their assistants discourage girlfriends and romantic relationships as they interfere with the learning process. This process, is where the pleasure is to be found.

Oesch argues¹⁹ that the techniques of seduction employed in 'The Game', especially those of Mystery – a three phase model of human courtship that consists of Attraction, building mutual Comfort and Trust, and Seduction, is based on solid empirical findings from social, physiological and evolutionary psychology. Oesch starts by describing the mainstream media attention multi-million dollar industry of the seduction community, and how the structure of courtship outlined in the Mystery Method is endorsed and advocated by the majority of the seduction community globally. The paper examines the methods written in Mystery's 'The Mystery Method: How to Get Beautiful Women into Bed' and Strauss' 'Rules of the Game', selected for the authors' prominence and popularity in the seduction community. Explaining how Mystery claims that he situates his teachings within a Darwinian framework and says that he teaches a 'science of social dynamics' grounded in evolutionary psychological research, including field-testing routines in interactions with thousands of women in bars, clubs, cafes, on the street and public gatherings, Oesch includes the oft-repeated Mystery quote, included in his book, on nature being cruel, and the necessity for men to take action.²⁰

The paper states that although much of the community does not directly acknowledge it, the starting point for the idea of Game begins with the theory of parental investment by Trivers²¹, which states that as the more invested sex when it comes to procreation and parental activities, women are less inclined to have casual sex, and so are more choosy when it comes to having sex with men. On the converse side, men are biologically less invested in sex, and have little to lose if mating with many females.²² Men have been empirically seen to desire more lifetime partners, want sexual intercourse sooner, and seem to be motivated to seek casual sex more. For instance, women typically need more time to feel intimacy, rapport and at ease with a new partner, to develop the same passion as men and consenting to sexual activity, this is referred to in Game as the 'seven hour rule', and has been observed theoretically and empirically in evolutionary science and social psychology.

The need for a method and algorithms for seducing women in postmodernity, the need to learn Game, arises from the complex social patterns and constructions that have arisen, most of them propagated by females, since our hunter-gatherer days. It is also due to a lack of biological, psychological and scientific understanding of human mating rituals by the general population.²³ The courtship process is confusing for most people, as they do not understand the sexual

¹⁷ *ibid.* "Although the Seduction Community is dominated by discourses drawn from socio-biology and evolutionary theory, much of its conceptual content exists in relationship with a longer historical tradition of self-help asceticism as well."

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Oesch, N. 2012. The Dating Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Emerging Science of Human Courtship. "Many of [the seduction community's] most prominent authorities claim to use insights and information gleaned both through first-hand experience as well as empirical research in evolutionary psychology."

²⁰ *ibid.* "In the preface to the text, Markovik (2007, p. xiii) ostensibly draws from Darwinian theory with the declaration, "Nature will unapologetically weed your genes out of existence if you don't take action and learn how to attract women now". Elsewhere in the text, Markovik (2007, p. 15) highlights the adaptive discrepancy between the modern environment and the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptiveness (Tooby and Cosmides, 1990) noting that, "while unimaginably sophisticated and complicated, [we] are nonetheless an out-of-date model. Put simply, nature has not designed [us] for the world in which [we] live".

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.* "Indeed, Schmitt et al. (2001) have shown that men desire more lifetime sex partners, seek sexual intercourse sooner, and are frequently more motivated to seek casual sex than are women."

²³ *ibid.* "In the absence of a clear understanding of the biological bases of such differences, the courtship process and ensuing relationship dynamics can often appear confusing, frustrating and even debilitating."

(and often opposing) strategies of both sexes. Learning Game can provide an answer to this confusion²⁴, especially as it is based on solid empirical research and first-hand courtship experience, writes Oesch, despite the qualms that much of the mainstream have with it. The seduction industry can be properly and ethically understood, with an informed appraisal, and lead to improved interactions between men and women. Oesch goes on to describe how the three phases of the Mystery Method, relate to detailed, grounded and specific research in evolutionary psychology and sociobiology science and academia. It is an important and valuable paper in this regard, paying attention to specific techniques used in Game, and finding their correlations within sociosexuality and evolutionary theories.

Speed seduction techniques and the response of women to men's assertive mating strategies, are examined by Hall and Canterbury.²⁵ They misconstrue the material of 'The Game', however, by interpreting it as just a way to tease and insult women.²⁶ This seems characteristic of most feminist-minded and mainstream-approved academia and thought. The paper examines if hostile and/or benevolent sexism were associated with reported use of assertive strategies by men, and reported positive reception to those strategies by women.²⁷ The researchers use ambivalent sexism theory to understand men's reported use of assertive 'aggressive' strategies, and the reported appeal of these strategies to women.²⁸ This presupposes that sexism is involved in using Game techniques when socializing and interacting with women. However, an adequate explanation for the presumption of sexism involved, or a description of sexism, is not given. A closer and genuine understanding of the Game material, is lacking in this paper by Hall and Canterbury. They conclude with stating that men's 'sexist' attitudes are not related to their use of assertive courtship strategies. Yet, they mention that the strategies which Game uses involve hostile sexism, and yet employ benevolent sexism also, and place a negative value judgement on seduction, dismissing²⁹ claims of women enjoying and being excited by the process of being seduced. It also presupposes that women are either/or looking for a long-term relationship, or one-night stands, and does not consider that women can be flexible, in the moment, and have varying desires for sex. Furthermore, Hall and Canterbury bring up possibilities of date rape by the use of such strategies, which, again, shows a lack of understanding of the seduction community material and Strauss' book, and the mainstream projection of overgeneralizing negative connotations onto these techniques.

Eastwick, Saigal and Finkel use³⁰ the comprehensive structural analysis of social behavior (SASB) observational coding scheme to examine which behaviors differentiate "smooth" from "awkward" initial romantic encounters, in their article. They evaluate smoothness as an ability to get along with someone and have a good communicative quality. The article examines speed-dating event participants in order to do this. The paper notes that those participants rated as "smooth" behaved more warmly and were more other-focused than the "awkward" participants. Thus, the researches stress the importance of "getting along" in seductive interactions, as opposed to some Game techniques which sometimes introduce a bit of friction into social interactions, such as the concept of the 'neg'.³¹ Here, we see a lack of true understanding regarding Strauss' book, and a dismissal or derision of the practice of Game in general. The authors make a note of SASB's potential as a framework that may explain why some social romantic interactions go well and others do not.

In this chapter I have outlined my questions and goals for the dissertation. I then discussed some prior research that has been done on the topic of Game and seduction. The following chapter deals with theory.

²⁴ *ibid.* "Given the frustration and confusion many singles currently experience in the dating marketplace, this knowledge could be an important aid to couples reducing conflict, frustration and finding fulfilling relationships."

²⁵ Hall, J. A. and Canterbury, M. 2011. Sexism and Assertive Courtship Strategies.

²⁶ *ibid.* "...assertive strategies were operationalized as involving attempts to isolate women, to compete with other men, and to tease or insult women."

²⁷ *ibid.* "It was predicted men and women who were more sexist and had an unrestricted sociosexuality would report using more and being more receptive to assertive strategies."

²⁸ *ibid.* "...ambivalent sexism is related to the characteristics desired in a romantic partner (Johannesen, Schmidt and Eagly 2002; Travaglia et al. 2009), mate selection processes (Bohner et al. 2010; Kilianski and Rudman 1998), and romantic scripts (Rudman and Heppen 2003). The present research seeks to extend these prior investigations by evaluating ambivalent sexism's role in the reported use of and preference for dominant courtship strategies, specifically the techniques advocated by speed seduction literature."

²⁹ *ibid.* "From women's perspective, it is less clear why such strategies would be appealing." "(Strauss 2005) clearly advocates the use of assertive strategies to engage in short-term mating (e.g., one-night stands). Similarly, assertive and explicit pick-up strategies convey an interest in short-term mating rather than long-term relationship initiation or friendship (Hall et al. 2008). More direct and dominant messages convey sexuality through the assertion of relational control (Lannutti and Monahan 2002), and more dominant men are preferred when women are seeking a short-term mate (Snyder et al. 2008).

³⁰ Eastwick, P. W., Saigal, S. D. and Finkel, E. J. 2010. Smooth Operating: A Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB) Perspective on Initial Romantic Encounters.

³¹ *ibid.* "...self-proclaimed pickup artists (Strauss, 2005) claim that men can make themselves more attractive to women using the "neg"—a belittling comment masquerading as a compliment."

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I discuss theories and research that is relevant to the topic of this dissertation. Some of these theories help to contextualize the topic, while others illuminate it from different angles, providing ways to approach the concept(s) of Game from academic and primarily social sciences perspectives.

To tackle the main themes and issues of this dissertation, I shall look through the prisms of various theorists, using, among others, the works of Bauman, Giddens, Kimmel and Kress.

The state of manhood in the 21st century in Western democratic societies, is not an obvious one. Men are beginning to understand their own evolution, after decades of discourse in both academia and the media on the women's movement, and their history, roles and struggles. Inequality exists towards men, too, however this does not seem to be discussed in mainstream media, politics, or even casual conversation.³² Evolutionary psychology is one way whereby men and women's differences can be explained through their trajectories in evolution.³³ Evolutionary biology and psychology is where a lot of PUA gurus and coaches got their theories and justifications from, in particular "Mystery" (aka Erik von Markovik).³⁴ Social theorists, particularly those in gender studies, see gender not as something natural and assumed, but as something that is being constantly advertised, reinforced and forced onto people.³⁵ Where Kimmel may be led astray, indeed a pitfall that happens in much of social science, is his over-generalization, his belief in individualism versus collective behavior, and his insistence that gender differences are produced as a result of gender inequality, and not due to other factors such as innate genetic disposition, social and biological necessity and conditioning, and reproductive primal instincts.

As such, and related to men's displacement in current social malaise in post-modern western societies, we see a growth of men's rights groups, and an ache for rites of passage and initiation from boyhood to manhood. Coming of age, or transition from liminality to manhood, is something which is being neglected in culture, education and in media.³⁶

In this literature review, I will mostly restrict myself to commentary on gender and sexes, and male gender and heterosexual men in particular, although at times class will be mentioned, though not overtly or explicitly. Race is not examined in this work, neither is ethnicity, nor, too, are other sexualities such as homosexuality, or religion. Again, I shall talk only about post-modern, post-industrialist, democratic western societies.

Firstly, I shall look at topics that are prevalent in masculinity studies, mostly in the last ten years, and relevant to the issues that a study of Game raises. Following this, I shall look at more broad social concepts on media, multimodality, identities, subcultures, modernity, homosociality, culture, sexuality and power, and consumerism. A limited look at femininity and feminist studies is used for comparative purposes throughout.

3.1 Rights

Progress has certainly been made with regards to women's rights in the west in the last few decades. However, with this progress, other situations and realities have manifested in which the status and indeed well-being of men has been overturned, or lessened, in negative terms, to the benefits and privileges now attained by feminism. Some level of authority, authenticity and reliability has fallen by the wayside, and this can be seen in popular culture and the ways in which characters, that of traditional male patriarchy and authority, or indeed masculinity itself, have been weakened,

³² Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 26. "From ... [different] ... evolutionary imperatives come different temperaments, the different personalities we observe in women and men."

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Venusian Arts website. "By closely examining how people engage each other during the "courtship" phase of a relationship and combining these observations with various theories from evolutionary psychology, he created a system of techniques and strategies developed to help men become better at engaging women in various social situations such as bars, clubs, coffee shops, and pretty much anywhere else. He shared his theories on an internet newsgroup, alt.seduction.fast, and became famous for his analytical approach to the field of seduction, as well as his in-depth "field reports". Mystery is credited with coining a number of terms and concepts in the seduction community. These concepts are borrowed from evolutionary psychology and theatrical showmanship, and his experience as a magician."

³⁵ Kimmel, 2004. p. vii. "If difference was so "natural", I'm continually thinking, why does it need to be so methodically and continuously forced [...] and why would it have to be so coercively reinforced at every turn?"

³⁶ A. O. Scott, New York Times article, 11 Sept. 2014. "In suggesting that patriarchy is dead, I am not claiming that sexism is finished, that men are obsolete or that the triumph of feminism is at hand [...] In the world of politics, work and family, misogyny is a stubborn fact of life. But in the universe of thoughts and words, there is more conviction and intelligence in the critique of male privilege than in its defense, which tends to be panicky and halfhearted when it is not obtuse and obnoxious. The supremacy of men can no longer be taken as a reflection of natural order or settled custom."

held less accountable or have been supplanted by feminized characters, or females themselves.³⁷ If no one knows how to conduct themselves in an adult fashion in popular media, how then are boys to become men, and conduct themselves with respect to the sexes and society [especially in the United States] itself?³⁸ Marriage, family founding, and responsibility are things to be avoided until the absolute last moment, and then only taken on begrudgingly. When considering the male side of human experience, we find in literature (particularly from American writers) and culture many examples of homosocial bonds and youthful rebels who escape the clutches of female authority and its restriction of male freedom.³⁹ Meaning and definition of manhood is lacking, and movies, music and books reflect this. Fulfilment of wants and duties must be balanced in order to achieve a holistic wellness and life, yet the focus is on the wants, at least when it comes to cultural tropes. The force of life and yet men's slipping relevance in the face of it, have resulted in a crises of sorts.⁴⁰ A crises of masculinity, and conversely, a crisis of authority.

The question, if these issues are one of Gender dynamics, or of Social dynamics, is one which is difficult to answer, although I will be looking at them more from the Social dynamics point of view, that is where "The Game" is situated. To be sure, consideration must be paid to the feminist movement. Radical feminisms' irrational hatred and reductionism of all patriarchy – which it claims to exist at all times and all places, universalizing patriarchy instead of placing it in historically specific terms – does not give credit to male's acceptance of or promotion of women's needs or interests.⁴¹ However, despite claims from some quarters that pickup and Game manipulates and objectifies women, there are some that argue that "hookup culture", that is, casual sexual relationships between men and women, has actually enabled feminism and the feminist movement to continue and thrive.⁴²

Women are increasingly avoiding more serious relationships, in case they hinder career or educational advancement. While many feminists say that the sexual revolution tricked women into give in to the demands of men who will not necessarily commit to them, and so leaves women vulnerable while liberating men, the gains that women have had in the past few decades are underappreciated, gains which in large part depended on sexual liberation.⁴³ Education and work opportunities for women mean delaying the onset of starting families, as technology such as the contraceptive pill and legal abortion have also contributed.⁴⁴ They may even make more money than similar-aged male counterparts. Marriage deferral and relationship commitment avoidances, along with the hookup culture, fit into these liberated women's agendas and lifestyles.⁴⁵ Men who are serious about dating, scare women away.⁴⁶ Young women are usually not as capricious, delicate and vulnerable as others imagine them to be.⁴⁷ They may complain at times about a certain lack of intimacy, but this in no way means that they would like to return to a more romantic time, or chivalrous men.⁴⁸ Instead, they prioritize finance, skill sets, career establishing and future success, over relationships.⁴⁹ "Sexual careers" and experimentation during this time period, which can last almost two decades, are a new norm. Boyfriends, if there are any, are seen as sub-marriage material, and impediments to future career prospects.⁵⁰ Lifestyle and ambitions are not

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 38.

⁴² Rosin, H. 2012. The Atlantic article. "To put it crudely, feminist progress right now largely depends on the existence of the hookup culture. And to a surprising degree, it is women—not men—who are perpetuating the culture, especially in school, cannily manipulating it to make space for their success, always keeping their own ends in mind."

⁴³ *ibid.* [the writer, referring to popular feminist culture journalists and fiction writers such as Caitlin Flanagan] "The central argument holds that women have effectively been duped by a sexual revolution that persuaded them to trade away the protections of (and from) young men. In return, they were left even more vulnerable and exploited than before. Sexual liberation, goes the argument, primarily liberated men—to act as cads, using women for their own pleasures and taking no responsibility for the emotional wreckage that their behavior created. The men hold all the cards, and the women put up with it because now it's too late to zip it back up, so they don't have a choice."

⁴⁴ *ibid.* "[...] this analysis downplays the unbelievable gains women have lately made, and, more important, it forgets how much those gains depend on sexual liberation. Single young women in their sexual prime—that is, their 20s and early 30s, the same age as the women at the business-school party—are for the first time in history more successful, on average, than the single young men around them."

⁴⁵ *ibid.* "What makes this remarkable development possible is not just the pill or legal abortion but the whole new landscape of sexual freedom—the ability to delay marriage and have temporary relationships that don't derail education or career."

⁴⁶ *ibid.* "For college girls these days, an overly serious suitor fills the same role an accidental pregnancy did in the 19th century: a danger to be avoided at all costs, lest it get in the way of a promising future."

⁴⁷ *ibid.* "...empowered college-age women. Even freshmen and sophomores are not nearly as vulnerable as we imagine them to be."

⁴⁸ *ibid.* "...I asked Tali and her peers a related question: Did they want the hookup culture to go away—might they prefer the mores of an earlier age, with formal dating and slightly more obvious rules? This question, each time, prompted a look of horror. Reform the culture, maybe, teach women to "advocate for themselves"—a phrase I heard many times—but end it? Never. Even one of the women who had initiated the Title IX complaint, Alexandra Brodsky, felt this way. "I would never come down on the hookup culture," she said. "Plenty of women enjoy having casual sex.""

⁴⁹ *ibid.* "The sexual culture may be more coarse these days, but young women are more than adequately equipped to handle it, because unlike the women in earlier ages, they have more-important things on their minds, such as good grades and intern-ships and job interviews and a financial future of their own. The most patient and thorough research about the hookup culture shows that over the long run, women benefit greatly from living in a world where they can have sexual adventure without commitment or all that much shame, and where they can enter into temporary relation-ships that don't get in the way of future success."

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

to be disrupted, in this way of thinking. Relationships steal energy and time necessary for studying and advancement, and women work hard to avoid them now.

Men's liberation emerged in the United States in the mid-1970s, initially as a mixture of social movement and self-help.⁵¹ Men felt disenfranchised with the way society was changing, a realization that instead of being and feeling powerful and oppressive (as feminism contended), they were unfulfilled and bored in their jobs, trapped in their marriages and detached from their children, having a small social circle, isolated and lonely.⁵² Male liberation also called for men to rid themselves of sex role stereotypes, and the "burden" of traditionally masculinity as a form of oppression, writes Kimmel.⁵³ Men were seeing themselves as failures. Kimmel cites Pleck, and claims that men no longer want to compete to live up to an impossible masculine image of being strong, silent, in control, unemotional, successful, lord of women, leader of men, wealthy, intelligent, athletic.⁵⁴ Masculinity's blueprint is conceptualized⁵⁵ as being destructive, leading to isolation and despair, lacking trust, afraid of intimacy, and unsatisfied. Femininity is to be avoided, masculinity is measured by power, wealth and success, real men are emotionally stable and inexpressive, and have aggression and bravery.⁵⁶ In the absence of adventure, sense of accomplishment or fulfilment, in mundane and lush office environments, men turned to wealth accumulation, according to Kimmel.⁵⁷ Stances of indifference as a form of self-protection became demonstrations of working-class manliness. Men's liberationists sought to reject competition, aggression and alienation by changing men's roles and work spaces, to promote a more individualized expression of themselves in a humanist manner. Kimmel cites actor Alan Alda when he goes so far as to agree with the actor that "a man isn't someone you'd want to have around in a crisis", using raising children or aging together as examples of such "crises", and seeming to again be overwhelmingly on the side of feminism and in opposition to masculinity itself.⁵⁸

3.2 Gender

Has the rise of women turned men into boys?⁵⁹ How can one be a man, if the very aspects of manhood that may define it, are criticized, banned, and called into question by feminism and society at large? Pleck created the Male Sex Role Identity (MSRI)⁶⁰ to see how men fit into a rational idea of masculinity. The model consists of testable propositions which include psychological sex typing, in terms of masculinity or femininity dimensions; sexy role identity comes from identification-modeling and reinforcement of sex-typed traits, hypermasculinity shows an insecurity in sex role identities, and so on.⁶¹ Related to the concept of liminality, Pleck notes that male adolescent initiation rites are a response to problems of sex role identity. This model is subsequently replaced by Pleck, by the Male Sex Role Strain model (MSRS)⁶², which attempts to explain why the sex role can cause such strain in men, and this model includes such factors as sex roles being contradictory and inconsistent, the number of individuals who violate sex roles is high, and violating sex roles has more serious consequences for males than it does for females.

This brings the focus from the men themselves, to the sex roles that they play.⁶³ Contradictory role demands seem to cause a lot of stress in men especially. The problem with these models, according to Kimmel⁶⁴ is that that they do not take into account the variety of roles that men and women can have. Instead, they posit one almost monolithic role, into which either all males, or all females, are expected to fit into. That is, there are different roles that men and women may take, which vary according to class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and location.⁶⁵ Thus, theories of sex roles cannot account for gender difference.

As a feminist, however, Kimmel argues in favor of the view that male domination presides over all roles and sexes, including that of other men.⁶⁶ Kimmel does not seem to adequately take into account the power that women have, nor the power that women have over men in the dating, romance, mate-finding and sexual arenas.

⁵¹ Kimmel, M. 1996. Manhood in America.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.* Citing Pleck, 1973.

⁵⁵ Kimmel, M. 1996. p. 281.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* Citing Brannon, R.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 283.

⁵⁹ Benedictus, L. 2011. The Guardian article, review of How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys by Kay S Hymowitz.

⁶⁰ Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 89 – 91.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.* "Despite what men and women may *feel* about their situation, men as a group have power in our society over women as a group. In addition, some men [...] have power over other men. Any adequate explanation of gender must not only account for gender difference but also for male domination."

Kimmel purports that constructions of gender are relational, that is, being a man has everything to do with what it is to be a woman, and vice versa.⁶⁷ We understand what it is to be a man or a woman in relation to the models which are dominant, and in relation to each other. Fields and institutions may also be gendered, not just individuals⁶⁸, and so workplaces, schools, families are gendered, and can reproduce differences and inequalities between men and women. The situations around people are important to ascertain, as they situate the lives of people.

Kimmel seems to discount the ideas of evolutionary biologists and psychologists, although the primary motivation behind most human behavior is sequenced in our DNA.⁶⁹ There can be exceptions and outliers, as in any case, but this (Kimmel's notion of the outliers almost being the majority)⁷⁰ case is a numbers game.⁷¹ As Game can be, too. On the outward appearance level, standards of beauty have risen, so that women and men now feel they have to express what is biologically different about them in a physical sense, as they have become more equal in the public sphere.⁷² Men are succumbing more and more to the Adonis Complex, as named by Pope⁷³, along with the accompanying body image disturbance and inadequacy that follows it. Similar to the changing proportions to the toy model Barbie for female, men's toys such as G.I. Joe have been increasing the proportions of muscles in relation to the rest of the body.

So too, men's magazines such as Men's Health have surged in popularity in the last decade or so, showing more proof that men, similar to women, are worrying about having a good body image and lifestyle. This idealization of form and body, make it easy for men to feel inadequate, which in a phenomenon that is becoming more prevalent.⁷⁴ These are not outlying cases, they are as Kimmel calls them, "overconformists" to gender norms that most of the population is subject.⁷⁵ There is a growing divide in society, not just between financially rich and poor people, or 'haves' and have nots', but also in terms of tactile and embodied realities, where thin and fit people are in sharp contrast to overweight and unhealthy people.⁷⁶ Kimmel remarks that this situation is also "deeply gendered".⁷⁷ Everyone can now be seen, or their bodies seen, as a sexual object, not just women anymore.⁷⁸

In Kimmel's estimation, for women, it is usually men (although their peers or other women do play a part) who are the intended recipients of the modification, for men, it is other men (and women). I would argue that in both genders, it is now for both genders that they are imagining to be seen when altering their bodies, as write Kimmel⁷⁹, Luciano⁸⁰ and Batchelor.⁸¹ Their peers and their sexual interests are the imagined viewers and audience for whom they modify their bodies. Kimmel goes on to say⁸² that it is the male gaze that motivates body modifications in both genders. I disagree, and think that in a sense he is vilifying men and victimizing women, as since the advent of social media on the internet, and apps such as Instagram (and media in general), men want to look better in front of women too, women are becoming more visual, on a par with men, and women's appraisal of men's physiques gradually becomes more important and deciding in the outcomes of interactions between the sexes; there is the rise of the *female* gaze. Pressure to live up to ideals, dominance and submission to these pressures, goes both ways, and clearly women are visual

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 27

⁷⁰ *ibid.* "[sarcastically] Don't blame the men, though – or even their genetic imperatives. It's really women's fault."

⁷¹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 25 "Culture has little to do with it, as Wilson argues, for "the genes hold culture on a leash."

⁷² Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 233, 234.

⁷³ *ibid.* "Pope and his colleagues call it the "Adonis Complex" – the belief that men must look like Greek gods, with perfect chins, thick hair, rippling muscles, and washboard abdominals."

⁷⁴ *ibid.* "As one college student told a journalist: "When I look in the mirror, I see two things: what I want to be and what I'm not. [...] I want to be the guy in the Gillette commercials."

⁷⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 235.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 236. "the traditional image of women as sexual objects has simply expanded: everyone has become an object to be seen".

⁷⁹ *ibid.* "Men [...] feel a need to look big, strong, and virile in front of other men."

⁸⁰ See Luciano, L. 2001. *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America*. New York: Hill and Wang.

⁸¹ Batchelor, B. 2011. "Today's man, for better or worse, is expected to be tough, aggressive, and successful, but also sensitive, well groomed, and stylishly dressed, almost a perfect melding of Pettegrew's brute and Luciano's metrosexual. [...] the male burden to portray an image mentally and physically that may or may not have anything to do with who he actually is or believes himself to be."

⁸² Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 237. "Nowhere is gender inequality better observed than by the motivations for both women and men in changing their bodies. It is the male gaze – whether as potential sexual partner, potential sexual rival, or competitor in the marketplace or athletic field – that motivates such drastic measures."

creatures too.⁸³ Women have ideals when it comes to male beauty.⁸⁴ Men are sized up on the basis of their appearance,⁸⁵ and this has a tendency to objectification and narcissism.⁸⁶ Christopher Lasch's theory of narcissism – where reality and illusion resulting from zealous exposure and consumption of images, shows the ways in which men attempt to validate themselves by pervasive standards.⁸⁷ Men now have access to the world of selfies and beauty products.⁸⁸ Men are allowed to look pretty, however they must still be masculine.⁸⁹ Along with men now becoming objects of desire, feminism has created new pressures and anxieties for men.⁹⁰ Not only do men now have to acquire success, they have to radiate an image of it also.

Concentrating solely on gender issues is a mistake of feminism, however. There are socially constructed differences which account for discrimination against women – and men – in the socio-political sphere also.⁹¹ However, that men and women are different is undeniable, and something which should not be downplayed or ignored.⁹² As such, it could be argued that sexual difference does not mean anything to feminism, and that women are encouraged not to stick to their biological rhythms, but to break free from being oppressed, risk their lives, create values and novelty in the world, be less feminine and more masculine.⁹³ This is to ignore the fact that the female sex is different from the male sex, and constructs freedom as being disembodied and a gender neutral transcendence.⁹⁴ This overcoming of otherness (a la Beauvoir), identifying with masculine ideals and aspirations, quenches women's individuality if taken too far.⁹⁵ Men and women are renegotiating the traditional scripts they have inherited, or in some cases, reinforcing them.⁹⁶ Men are having to respond to the changing structures of women's choices, when it comes to family, children and career. This transforms gender relations.

It is best to view maleness as existing on a continuum, with some men exhibiting more physical and behaviorally masculine traits, and others more feminine, but none being the absolute epitome of "ideal" manhood.⁹⁷ As such, then, there is no strict dualistic actuality, between masculinity and femininity. Related to this, subjective gender identity is how people view themselves overall in terms of masculinity or femininity. It involves a person's knowledge of his genital structure, and also an organized conception of continuously distributed physical and psychological characteristics of self which he believes as being relevant to gender. Subjective gender identity is a statement about one's relative masculinity, and can also be thought of as existing along a continuum. Still, if a man has a proportionally greater number of masculine characteristics than feminine, he will generally be thought of as a man, at least to some degree.

Male gender determination can be complex, relating to psychological components, physical components, cultural and subcultural components, the enactment of masculine roles, judgments of observers on relative masculinity, which are subjective and compared with a prototypical conception of a male.⁹⁸ When enacting social roles, the male is judged by others in conforming to the masculine ideal, whether it is distinct from prototypical feminine behaviors, depending upon interpretations of the male's behavior and performance as well as interpretations of the behavior along a masculine-feminine continuum. One's choice of sexual partner can largely determine this as a factor in male masculinity. This is

⁸³ Luciano, L. 2001. Chapter 1. "“Most men are conscious of the fact that they are competing not only with younger [male] competitors but with women who know how to take care of themselves.” -David Nap, marketing VP.”

⁸⁴ *ibid.* "Virtually every study of body image still confirms that for women the medium, V-shaped, athletic physique of the mesomorph represents the masculine ideal."

⁸⁵ Brubach, H. 2001. "That men are now sized up on the basis of their appearances, that this scrutiny has brought on an epidemic of anxiety and has come to oppress men much as it has oppressed women, and that men have consequently begun paying more attention to their looks -- none of this will come as news to anyone who has been awake for the past 30 years."

⁸⁶ See Lasch, C. 1979, 1991. The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations. New York: Norton. (Revised edition 1991).

⁸⁷ Brubach, H. 2001.

⁸⁸ *ibid.* "...men's preoccupations with their looks have lately been legitimized at least in part because feminism has loosened the strictures for both sexes. However informally, men and women have worked out a trade: women got access to the world of ideas, and men to the realm of appearances. [...] men [...] now have permission to be vain in a way that previous generations did not."

⁸⁹ Hansen, S. 2001. "...Klein's manly mannequins came to embody three American ideals: They were buff, they were masculine and they were pretty."

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 74.

⁹² *ibid.* "To the extent that arguments for the equality of the sexes require that we emphasize their similarities, feminism has downplayed the differences between the sexes that, however much they are ignored, nonetheless remain. [...] the separation of sex from gender [...] [by feminists] masks an inadequate conceptualization not only of sexual difference but also of gender."

⁹³ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 75.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Kimmel, M. S. (ed). 1987. Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity.

⁹⁷ Franklin, C. W. 1984.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

not just dependent on if the woman that the man chooses to be his partner, has female genitals. She must also, in terms of behavior and attitude, be feminine, and opposite to him in every regard (opposite gender-related characteristics), to ensure that he is considered to be totally masculine and a real man, and underlines the male's dependence on heterosexuality as a marker of his masculinity.

3.3 Masculine Success and Objectification

When it comes to Game, radiating an image of masculinity and success is paramount to getting the “best quality” girls. However, despite protestations from the seduction community that “it does not matter what you look like”, because men are visual creatures, and women are more emotional, there are two caveats. One, is that the seduction community generally still encourages the would be PUA to groom themselves well, dress themselves well, and to be fit and work out to get the best possible body and be in the best possible shape that they can be. Another, is, as mentioned before, that women are increasingly becoming visual creatures. The rise of the “himbo” is more proof of this⁹⁹, where physically attractive but not intelligent men are held in esteem and desired by women. This also coincides with women's growing power in terms of wages and finances – sometimes more than what men earn – and their lessening reliance on men for support and security, which frees them up to pursue men purely for pleasure.¹⁰⁰ Where this leaves men, in terms of how to pair-bond or find women, is now contributing to the need for more seduction companies, more coaches, and increased instability and anxiety in masculinity.

Ironically, for men who are purely using their looks in order to attract females, this societal means they have less work to do, much as in the case of bimbos or attractive females. However, this leads to the objectification of men, which is surely not a positive development arising from feminist achievements.¹⁰¹ Expectations for what a woman's (sexual) partner may be raised, but simultaneously the standards for those men's behavior, intelligence, kindness and ambition are lowered. On the other hand, by making things more simple and not relying on the myths that women need the aforementioned traits in males to be present before they sleep with them, men can be more free to be who they are, in the sense of not needing to play a smoke and mirrors scenario with each new woman that they meet. Women's sexual choices show that these traits do not need to be present, and so men and women can save themselves the anguish of not having false expectations or disappointments if things are more clear and straightforward, and indeed more simple, from the beginning. This means, though, that men's looks *do* matter after all, at least to a certain degree.^{102 103} Women, when it comes to dating, have the majority of privilege, in post-modern Western societies. Do men have to feel less good in order for women to feel good?¹⁰⁴ In order for feminist goals to be realized, do women have to objectify men, and devalue them? In this sense, do two wrongs make a right?¹⁰⁵ It would seem, objectively, that this is not an egalitarian sentiment, when it comes to long reaching goals of equality and fair treatment for both sexes. Instead, it may foster alienation, emotional repression, detachment and resentment. Objectification is not just a problem that women have to endure anymore.¹⁰⁶ The objectification of men may have these effects, of inadequacy, insecurity and never feeling good enough, which are even less written about than the female gaze¹⁰⁷ is, currently.

3.3.1 The Female Gaze

Bodily experiences in the real world cannot be understood apart from or in abstract from meanings, contexts and subjectivities that infuse experiences with their uniqueness.¹⁰⁸ Thus, feminists and other theorists cannot entirely divorce themselves from the reality of the body and its lived-in-ness, and temporality and spatiality/place. Feminism uncritically embraces the ideal of equality, in the same way as it takes as a given that women are treated differently from men, so that both the differences and the solution are thought of as obvious.¹⁰⁹ This results in the meaning of sexual difference being unexamined by feminism, especially, the acceptance of sexual differences themselves (rather than sexual appropriation and emulation by women of men, and eradication of sexual differences). Differences do not

⁹⁹ Schwyzer, H. 2012. Clearly, Women are Visual Creatures Too.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Moore, T. 2014. For the Love of Shallow: Yes, Women Are Attracted to Hotties.

¹⁰³ Tremmel, P. V. 2008. Rethinking What We Want in a Partner.

¹⁰⁴ Hubbard, K. 2012. Not So 'Magic Mike': Are Women Becoming the Men We Despise?

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Wegenstein, B. 2012. pp. 174 – 177.

¹⁰⁸ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 129. See also, Luce Irigaray An Ethics of Sexual Difference.

¹⁰⁹ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 138.

automatically signal inferiority, also, they should not be reacted against or assimilated/emulated (for example, by creating sameness). Women, as men, must see themselves in relation to themselves¹¹⁰ and not in comparison; a creation of new models and images. The presuppositions of what constitutes success (and indeed equality – always in relation to differences) must be questioned, which may lead to less of an emphasis on irreducible differences, or the sex/gender ideology of feminism.¹¹¹

For decades, it has been surmised that men are visual creatures, and women are more emotional.¹¹² While experientially and anecdotally this may be the case, and seduction gurus cite evolutionary biology and evolutionary history as proof of this, and so base a lot of their tactics around it, culture would have us see that women are at least almost as, if not as visual, as men are. The Game promotes the idea that any man, regardless of his physical looks or financial situation, can sleep with and date beautiful women, if he uses the correct tactics, because “attraction is not a choice”, and if you flip the correct switches, the results are (almost) guaranteed. This relies on the (disputed) premise that women are emotional creatures and that they are primarily turned on by psychological and emotional connections and flirtations. The success of the mobile phone application Instagram, which shares photos, and is used by women more than men, somewhat contradicts this. Whether these women are playing to the male gaze (their identification as objects of desire), or facilitating and encouraging a response from males to post their own “selfies”, that is, self-taken photographs of themselves, in order to be deemed attractive and judged by females, has not been fully determined as of yet. Women are slowly creating the space for more agency in social and sexual interactions; despite the fact of historically being the passive sex (in western cultures), being socialized *not* to act out sexually except in monogamous relationships, and with the attendant risk of being labelled as “sluts” or sexually deviant, or crossing over heteronormative lines and boundaries.

There are comparative levels of body dissatisfaction among both sexes. Men desire to be more muscular and bigger.¹¹³ Cultural pressures regarding men’s bodies have increased dramatically, as have displays of male bodies in objectifying manners – often unclothed, headless, or in sexually suggestive positions. Images of male bodies have become increasingly muscular and V-shaped, emphasizing broad shoulders, developed arm and chest muscles, and slim waists.¹¹⁴ Viewers, over time, start to accept this as a valid reality. To be seen as a valid man, men feel the pressure to attain this type of body. Frequent exposure and increased media focus on muscular and toned men’s bodies, have led men to have increased dissatisfaction with their bodies. Self-ideal and potential discrepancies are more commonplace now, connected to weight and shape of men’s bodies. Other factors such as hair, style, sweat and odor, portrayed in images and depictions of sanitized and body-hairless men, contribute to the experience of being embodied, and the pressure to be an ultimate man.¹¹⁵ Sexual situations can thus arise feelings of fear of negative evaluation.

Men may withdraw from physical and emotional situations as a result of this fear, inadequacies and maladjustment. In this way, body satisfaction is likely to contribute to sexual decision making among men. They may feel shame for their bodies, and may not want to be seen when having sex. They may withdraw themselves emotionally, so as to distance themselves from any potential evaluations, and restrict themselves in terms of choice of activity. Lower physical condition body esteem is connected to low body esteem. Aspects such as body hair and sanitation are especially seen as being negatively affected by media use; decreased body esteem is also seen.¹¹⁶ Sometimes, however, exposure to the ideal male image, such as in men’s health and fitness magazines, can produce motivation in the viewers/readers. Men who read such magazines may be already closer to the muscular ideal, or have become closer through use of the techniques in these magazines/websites, though, and other men may actively avoid such magazines to prevent low feelings of self-worth.

Similarly, exposure to idealized versions and images of sanitized bodies leads men to feel that they do not live up to the ideal, and experience shame, with regard to hair and sweat, for example. So too, do low self-worth and body attitudes lead to poor sexual health and thoughts in men. Men’s attitudes about their bodies is only just beginning to receive attention, academically and elsewhere, so research on this area is quite limited at present.

Mishkind, as cited by Kimmel, writes that men are preoccupied with body image, and have an idealized body image maintained that they aspire to, which he calls “muscular mesomorph”.¹¹⁷ Men see themselves in terms of a perceived distance from the mesomorphic ideal. This bodily preoccupation has been increasing in recent years. One reason for this

¹¹⁰ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 172.

¹¹¹ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 222.

¹¹² James, B. 2012. *The Evolution of the Female Gaze: An Introduction*.

¹¹³ Schooler, D. and Ward, L. M. 2006, 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Kimmel, M. S. (ed). 1987. *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*.

is women's increased participation in the public sphere – cognitive, life-style and occupational differences between the sexes have been decreasing, so that body image is one of the areas in which men can differentiate themselves from women. Kimmel takes a cue from Barbara Ehrenreich, and suggests that increased body awareness among men is due to the decrease in men drawing identity from the role of breadwinner in a consumerist capitalist society, and then perceiving their bodies as a reflection of their role as autonomous consumers.¹¹⁸

Kimmel cites Messner, who says that athletic competition is an important aspect to the individual life structure of the male; it expresses a set of behaviors associated with masculinity. When athletes leave sports, it becomes a recreational aspect in their life, and so goes from a primary source of identity, to just a source among many, and this transition can be difficult for some men.¹¹⁹ Herek (as cited by Kimmel) argues that masculinity can not only be seen as constructed in part by differentiating it from femininity, but also heterosexual masculinity (normative masculinity) is constructed in part from differentiating it from homosexuality.¹²⁰ Thus, homophobia can be seen as a vital component of heterosexual masculinity. Herek echoes Hacker's¹²¹ assessment that masculinity is more important to men than femininity is to women, because they have much more at stake, having to differentiate themselves from both women and homosexual men.

Traditionally, women have been concerned with their appearance, in the western modern societies. However, this has certainly changed in the last couple of decades.¹²² cursory glances at the media show strong evidence of this. Physical appearance and body image play a significant role for men. The fascination with young, lean, muscular men, and men's fashion and styles – which have transformed to accommodate changes in men's physiques towards muscular and trim bodies – is quite prevalent. There is a blurring of feminine and masculine to some extent, with the marketing and selling of men's cosmetics that a couple of decades ago would have been considered too feminine for men's use.¹²³ Society's attitudes towards men's bodies, and men's behavior regarding their appearance, have transformed significantly. How body image fits into men's sense of masculinity, is an important research topic. The masculine ideal is quite strict and harsh, difficult to live up to and attain, and to maintain and keep. In this sense, it is extremely difficult to be a "real man", similar to what feminists have been bemoaning, in that the standards are so high. It can be posited, that women's demands and standards of what type of man they predominantly want and are attracted to, have gone up and reached unattainable levels, so that men feel pressured to achieve this "perfect man" ideal that women have.

If a man can attain this ideal, then there are social and sexual benefits to his masculine status and male sex role. The efforts that men undergo to attain this ideal are enormous, and there can be huge pressure to keep going further with this effort, to become more and more perfect. This pressure may produce physical and psychological ill effects, and this effects increase due to historical trends.¹²⁴ Of college-aged men that Mishkind surveyed, 95 percent felt dissatisfaction with some aspect of their bodies.¹²⁵ Men have images of their own body and their ideal body, which they carry around with them; these images are not identical. This dissatisfaction is highly specific and differentiated. For example, men worry about their weight, their waist and their chest. Other areas such as arms, nose, shoulders, hips, stomach and height also cause great concern for men. Men experience significant dissatisfaction if they deviate from the ideal male body type – which is mesomorphic, that is well-proportioned, average build – as opposed to ectomorphic, that is thin, or endomorphic, that is fat.¹²⁶ This preference can be expressed by boys as young as five or six, and also by college age men and other men. In evolutionary terms, the body ideal shows females that a male is healthy, will produce healthy and strong offspring, that the man is strong and can protect the woman and potential children, and that he can hunt for food and provide for them. So too, the size, hardness and duration of his erection, shows these things to females. Indeed, the ability to give a woman pleasure sexually, to the point of orgasm, has in recent times become another significant pressure, in order to prove to himself and to women that he is a good lover, worthy of their attention, adoration and affection, and a "real man". This pressure has increased to due women's increased agency, more vocal demands for better and more perfect men. Accordingly, men are innately worried about these attributes, and feel like they should do their best to either enhance or maintain them, or obtain them.

¹¹⁸ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 16.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 17.

¹²² Kimmel, M. S. 1987. pp. 37 – 48.

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

In the mesomorphic categories that Mishkind (as cited in Kimmel) describes¹²⁷, a majority of men (and women who desire men) prefer the hypermesomorphic or muscular mesomorphic body type. This physique is characterized by well-developed chest and arm muscles, and wide shoulders which taper down to a narrow waist. Another term for this is the “V-shaped” body. Men (and their female partners) indicate greater satisfaction to the extent that their self-reported or actual body shape resembles this ideal.¹²⁸

The body dissatisfaction of men, in terms of how far away from this ideal hypermesomorphic body type they are, becomes problematic when men believe (and women believe and behave accordingly) that those who are closest to the ideal reap certain benefits which are not available to those further away. Research strongly suggests that this is true, because physical appearance is so important in our society, and because of the specific benefits that accrue to mesomorphic men.¹²⁹ In Western culture, what is beautiful, is good and right. This is axiomatic. In kindergarten children, attractive peers are viewed as smarter and friendlier than unattractive peers – a view that is continued on to adulthood. Physical attractiveness is also correlated significantly with popularity. Teachers treat attractive children more favorably and perceive them as more intelligent than less attractive children and students. Attractive adults are believed to live happier and more successful lives. Attractive people certainly enjoy distinct advantages in interpersonal situations.¹³⁰ Attractive people are more likely to receive help, to gain cooperation in conflict situations and to experience more satisfying interpersonal relationships. Tangentially, attractive people have better chances, as job applicants, to be successful, and to receive higher starting salaries. Contrasting this, obese people are stigmatized by adults and children, especially when obese people are perceived as being responsible for their condition. Mesomorphic physiques are considered more attractive than nonmesomorphic physiques, and men with this type of body do receive more social benefits. Studies show that people assign overwhelmingly positive personality traits to people and photographs of mesomorphic males (such as strong, popular, best friend, helpful, healthy, smart, neat, polite), and mostly negative traits to ectomorphic (such as dirty, worries, lies, tired, stupid, lonely, lazy) and endomorphic males (such as quiet, nervous, sneaky, afraid, sad, weak and sick).¹³¹ These stereotypes exist in both the working/lower and middle classes.

There is both an innate biological premise for body build and personality, that is, a genetic determinant, and also a socially learned premise, cultural preferences towards mesomorphic males and aversions to endomorphic and ectomorphic males. Cultural views of masculinity and the male sex role prescribe that men be powerful, dominant, strong and even destructive. The body type ideal fits into this image/role. Men make their bodies an “instrument of power”, and a muscular body can serve as a symbolic embodiment of these personal characteristics of strength, active, unemotional and of being like a soldier.¹³² People rate mesomorphically proportioned bodies as the most masculine. This embodiment of masculinity is seen to have greater mastery over himself and his environment, and more invulnerable. Stereotypes such as being a fighter, active or daring, are applied by people to mesomorphic boys, research has shown, but not to endomorphic or ectomorphic boys. Males also view their bodies along functional, attractive/aesthetic and active dimensions, in contrast to women, who primarily view themselves along an aesthetic dimension. Men consider physical attractiveness equivalent to physical potency.¹³³ Thus there is an intimate relationship between body image and masculinity in men. A man who fails to live up to the ideal of the muscular, lean, V-shaped male body, is by implication, not a real man, or less of a man, and failing to live up to sex-role norms, not as attractive to women, and may experience the consequence of violating these norms (such as lack of success in dating, women not responding well or finding him so attractive).

Studies have shown significant correlations between a man’s sense of self, self-worth, and his feelings about his body¹³⁴, some studies showing that men have an even *greater* relationship between body satisfaction and measures of self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, than women have. How a man feels about himself is tied closely with how he feels about his body, playing a crucial role in self-esteem. The greater the gap between their actual body type and the ideal body type, the lower their self-esteem. As a result, men feel motivated to close this gap, and depending upon feasibility or lack thereof, this can lead to further feelings of disappointment, rejecting, alienation and depression. Men’s body dissatisfaction also extends to the face, and physical attractiveness; men want to be handsome and good-looking, and so want attractive eyes, nose, chin and cheeks, along with upper body strength, and physical conditioning, that is, being in

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

shape, physically fit, physical stamina, energy level, weight and stomach. Each of these dimensions suggests specific ways in which men could attempt to narrow the distance between their real and ideal selves.¹³⁵ Gym memberships, weight training, running, swimming, cycling and other aerobic workouts, protein and diet supplements, the now-booming men's cosmetics industry, diet programs, and increasing numbers of men opting for plastic surgery and treatments like massages, waxing and manicures, attest to this. Still, functional dimensions, located on and within the body, to lose weight and gain muscle and mass, are what men focus on the most. Physical effects of endurance workouts may be less readily visible than the effects of body building, so that more men opt for weight training to build muscle and be recognized for their physical masculinity. Men's interest in the body, is also partly prompted by the collapse of the workplace as an arena in which to test and prove masculinity.¹³⁶

People believe that everyone can improve themselves, it is a societal attitude, and exercise and dieting show beliefs that body size and shape are under volitional control.¹³⁷ This ignores the genetic components of build and metabolism. The costs to achieve this male body type ideal, may be considerable for a lot of men, with increased focus on their limitations and distance from the ideal type. The shame of failure adds a devastating weight. Conversely, the more a man experience's a closing of this gap, through exercise for example, the higher his self-esteem will be, increased body satisfaction, positivity towards body and self, and a greater sense of self-efficacy and practical capability. Those who opt to not try and change themselves, suffer from guilt and self-criticism. Eating disorders and excessive attention and participation in body-altering behavior can be another effect of this ideal male body type, and the focus on and ubiquitous image of the masculine ideal, and western culture's omnipresent emphasis on lifestyle change and self-management as major health-promoting activities. The body thus symbolizes the extent of one's self-corrective behavior and self-determination.

Due to women's increasing societal power and positioning in areas once solely-occupied by men, the only traditional avenue left to men to assert, express and preserve male characteristics, is to embody them. This muscle building may also be connected to military operations and flexing of strength and power, soldierization of men, and indeed cultural and societal trends in music and media, with emphases on urban gangs, and survivalist tactics both in urban and rural settings. It also attempts to preserve traditional male/female polarization and differences. The ideal body type thought by people as existing for men is more different from what typical or actual men's bodies look like. Developmental studies are needed to further delve into these issues, which are fundamental to the male experience, similar to gender and sex as self-defining characteristics of heterosexual masculinity.

Fitness implies an always-on-the-move figure¹³⁸, a flexibility and hardiness to the negative effects of experience. Health is presented as a norm, on the other hand. Both imply an ability to move onwards, to rise to increased levels of experience and challenge. The pursuit of fitness, writes Bauman, is infused with incurable anxiety and is a never-ending source of self-indignation. There is always a new horizon to conquer, and a new fitness goal to achieve, so that the man is never enough in himself, by himself. Paradoxically, the body's trainer, owner and guardian, is the same entity which collects sensations, two roles which, Bauman writes, are incompatible. This postmodern affliction, a cause of ever present anxiety, may be impossible to cure.

The centrality of body-cultivation¹³⁹ in the activity of self-constitution, results in a fear of damage of poisoning or damaging the body, such as through skin contact or disease, underlining the importance of the body among self-constituting concerns. The reproduction of order of the self is practiced through the discipline of the bodily drill. The human body is seen in postmodernity as a sole constant factor among fickle identities.¹⁴⁰ It is the carrier and executor of past, present and future identities. Self-constitutive efforts focus on staying alive and enhancing the capacity of the human body for absorbing sensuous input impressions and producing a constant supply of publically readable self-definitions. From this, we can see the centrality of body-cultivation in self-assembly and self-definition concerns. Acute attention is paid to everything ingested internally, all that comes in contact with the skin, the interface between the agent and rest of the habitat, and the horizon of the 'autonomously managed identity'.¹⁴¹

The postmodern habitat, according to Bauman, promotes DIY operations, such as jogging, dieting and bulking, which replace and displace the panoptical drill of the modern factory, school or barracks. Yet, these operations are not perceived as being externally imposed, nor are they resented necessities. Instead, they are seen as manifestos of agents' freedom. Seduction takes the place of coercion. Self-constitution as a process is not monitored by a life-project designed

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Kimmel, M. 1996.

¹³⁷ Kimmel, M. S. 1987.

¹³⁸ Bauman, Z. 2001.

¹³⁹ Bauman, Z. 1992.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

in advance, rather there is a set of orientation points which can guide moves; other agencies (whether real or imagined) of the habitat, serve as these orientation points, yet they impact the process of self-constitution in oblique ways, for they do not monitor nor knowingly administer acts of allegiance nor any actions which may follow it.¹⁴² Any allegiance is applied for personally, without permission to leave or stay, and signified through the adoption of symbolic tokens of belonging, which may be discarded at any point the actor wishes to change his identity – the only limit, says Bauman, being the availability and accessibility of said tokens.

3.4 Friendship and Homosociality

One charged levelled against PUAs and aspiring PUAs is that of intimacy avoidance. Kimmel¹⁴³ writes on this kind of avoidance, where emotional expressiveness, an incapacity to share, and avoidance of self-disclosure can wreak havoc on men's emotional and physical health. In historical cultural terms, this used to be the opposite, where men had the most deep and valued relationships with each other. Currently, there are emotional and competitive barriers between men which limits the capacity to share vulnerabilities and weaknesses. On the other hand, these barriers and parameters are in place due to competitiveness between men for resources (in Game terms, for fertile and attractive females), the need to be in control, and the need to avoid appearing weak in order to maintain a competitive edge. Traditionally, men do not give much thought to friendship or maintenance of relationships (of any kind).

Men learn to avoid being weak and showing their vulnerable sides, and seem to have a lack of positive male role models for intimacy. Indeed, there are what some call a 'feminization of love' and 'feminine norms' of relationships which has happened in academia and the wider society, whereby men's traditional conceptions and expectations of friendship and of romance has been discounted or discredited.¹⁴⁴ Hegemonic and normative roles of men and women, as examined by sex role theory¹⁴⁵ are beyond the scope of this thesis; suffice it to say that sex role theory posits masculinity and femininity as constants and defined, and preordained, whereas theorists such as Kimmel maintain that sex roles are performed and flowing, contextually and situationally sensitive and based.¹⁴⁶ That is, gender is a set of behaviors that are produced in specific social situations.

To consider the majority of the Western population, in terms of biological norms, I shall proceed by taking the commonplace and prevalent female and male genders as a given, and presuppose that the discussion and theory which I am examining relates to these. Having said this, it in no way discounts or ignores that there are more than one way to perform sex roles. Movements such as feminism seek to expand such roles and break constraints.

It is because of some of the confusion around masculine roles and how to obtain heterosexual females, that masculinity is in its current crisis. For almost twenty years, feminists and progressives have espoused the man in touch with his feelings, able to harness his feminine side, and able to cater to feminine wiles.

This is in contrast with men's primary role (historically and biologically) as breadwinners and as masculine entities. These are held up as models, hegemonic definitions, by which men identify themselves.¹⁴⁷ These definitions are challenged occasionally culturally and usually academically; Kimmel is a good example of such criticism. As I said, however, in general I will use the categories of men and women in this work.

The hunting and gathering of men in tribal societies depended on the division of labor, where women were the stay at home and nurturing gender, and men the protectors and providers.¹⁴⁸ When allies and friendships need to be formed, it has been found that men and women have the same desires for friendship, and roughly the same number of friends, as each other.¹⁴⁹ They do, however, have different ways of achieving and expressing friendship and intimacy. Women may disclose more to their friends, and men may have less investment in their friendships. Men tend to share activities, women tend to share feelings with each other and be more person oriented.¹⁵⁰ Women's friendships seem to be more holistic, while men's tend to be segmented. Men's friendships also disintegrate more over time, as they are maintained less than women's. Social and economic differences can play a part in influencing these situations, as well as the inherent differences between sexes. More studies have found few differences between men and women's friendships;

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 215.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 95 – 97.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 55.

¹⁴⁹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 216.

¹⁵⁰ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 217.

they show that over time levels of intimacy, activity, self-disclosure, and assumed significance, are quite similar.¹⁵¹ Men seem to do it in a different way, embedded in activities and more covertly in general. Friends and lovers may be ranked differently, in terms of importance, at different times. Sex may ruin a friendship, or someone may be just a friend, in friendships between the sexes.¹⁵² Homophobia is an organizing principle of same-sex friendships between men, and another factor that prevents disclosure of feelings and thoughts which can be intimate, even in a non-sexual way.¹⁵³ Even friendship between men can be contrary to what masculinity in the traditional sense is supposed to be about, and men may find themselves needing to explain friendships. The defense of one's own masculinity is evinced in this, as it is in the way that one must think about the way one dresses, acts, talks, walks and interacts with people, so that no one will get the wrong idea about you.¹⁵⁴

Caring about, or needing another man as a friend is a schizo-genesis act and presents some cognitive dissonance. Friendship is associated with homosexuality among most men.¹⁵⁵ These days, it seems that women's friendships are deeper than men's, due to men being more task-oriented and instrumental, and women being more expressive and empathic. The emotional and identity forming of boys and girls, separation from the mother, establishing independence, and gendered experiences while growing up, shape women's and men's friendship patterns. According to Rubin, as cited by Kimmel, society and personality are in a symbiotic relationship with each other, continually shaped by economic and cultural developments.¹⁵⁶

Intuitions are a key part of this personal change, and need to be examined as much as the self. The evolution of the workplace insured that instrumental rationality for men was valued above all else as a trait, competitiveness and achievement were the respected outcomes of this. Women were left at home to be more emotionally intimate, which became equated with femininity. Kimmel writes that this was a case where gender inequality produced differences that then legitimated the inequalities.¹⁵⁷

In factory situations, sexual stories and jokes have been observed as a way of bonding masculinity in working class men in a ritualized sexual exchange.¹⁵⁸ This is a homosocial function of sexuality that begins in early adolescence. Psychologically, it has been suggested¹⁵⁹, male sexual performances may have as much to do with male gender role confirmation and homosocial status, as with pleasure, tension release or intimacy. After industrialization, marriage began to be a fusion of sexual passion and deep friendship, companionate, for the first time in history. Similarly, personal autonomy became the highest goal of individual achievement.¹⁶⁰ Thus a gender gap in emotional expressiveness was formed.

Men can use sexist jokes as a form of homosocial bonding, where men are the jokers and performers, and other men and women are the audience. There is a strong heterosexual element to this performance.^{161 162} When men, as in the buddy film, get together and share experiences, masculine failure (the world and women have failed them) can solidify friendship, and male bonding can result in profound insights not just for the male experience but for the human experience. However, when escaping the "civilizing constraints of women", as in an all-male hike for example, men open themselves up to being vulnerable to nature and to other men: the possibility that they will be attacked, raped or murdered by other men.¹⁶³

Men, in the face of the feminization of culture and manhood, and the eroding barriers in the workplace, family life and social interactions, searched for homosocial preserves where they could be real men with other men. These places include sports teams, hunting events, gym activities, drinking and outdoors pursuits.¹⁶⁴ These facilitate closeness among men, bonding and drinking, having rituals, contact with nature and one another. Many businesses have such weekend retreats, as ways of affirming (masculine) power and symbolic interaction, and excluding others. Retrieving this lost, and deep manhood, a primitive form of masculinity, rescues men somewhat from the clutches of the feminizing worlds

¹⁵¹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 219.

¹⁵² Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 221.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 222.

¹⁵⁶ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 224.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 167.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 19.

¹⁶² Kimmel, M. 1996.

¹⁶³ *ibid.* p. 288.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

of work and home, from their mothers and lost fathers and partners and children, in the hopes of finding their warrior selves, and lives of meaning and resonance.¹⁶⁵

Paradoxically, the emotional repression and isolation characteristic of masculinity is broken down in these retreats and groups, where men can feel more at ease in sharing their experiences and to exhibit the pain, confusion and loneliness they may feel, and to bond on a deep empathetic level. These men need mentors to help them navigate new and uncertain waters, and this is why the seduction community has been so successful in marketing itself to men. Men's friendships, as previously mentioned, tend to revolve around activities that are shared, such as sports. Thus, men tend to form instrumental relationships, rather than ones based on emotional expressiveness. Reasons for this include socialization, competitiveness, dominance and learned fears of emotional intimacy with other males.¹⁶⁶

The male who is correctly socialized into masculinity is not capable of forming close ties with other males. Competitiveness also renders self-disclosure and emotional intimacy difficult, as potential male rivals may use such "information" or "weakness" against you in the future, in competitive male games. Men do make friends, however, but these friendships can lack the closeness, trust, spontaneity and comradery that most would characterize as friendship. Men may meet other men through their female mate's female friends, and so express their emotions vicariously through women in such situations, perpetuating the male role as stoic and unemotional.

Liking may be necessary for friendship, but it is not wholly sufficient.¹⁶⁷ Friendship can be viewed as a structural relationship which has more behavioral components than does liking. For example, one may not be close friends with a lot of people, but may be liked by a lot of people, and may like a lot of people. Friendship is more mutual than liking. Friendship is also more correlated to spending time together than is liking. Friendship is a social relationship, whereas liking is a feeling. It may be possible that men, being instrumental, do not form friendships with other men that they really like, that is, that male friendships are based more on mutuality than liking, that friendships are based more on joint participation in leisure activities than is liking. Men may not spend time with men toward whom they have strong positive feelings.¹⁶⁸ Men may be afraid to spend time with other men that they really like, due to fear of homosexuality, Homosexism, or fear of their masculinity being questioned. An instrumental explanation to self and others for why they spend time with other men, is necessary for men to hold onto their heterosexual masculinity, and to be seen, in strictly regulated activities, with other men. They associate with other men, not due to potential positive effects, but due to enjoyment of similar activities.

Masculine or androgynous women may be preferred as friends to more traditionally and opposite-masculine women. The latter are usually more preferred as romantic partners.¹⁶⁹ Men may prefer some women's masculine characteristics in some situations, but they find them threatening in romantic situations. Many men may find it inappropriate to become romantically involved with women who exhibit gender characteristics similar to their own. Heterosexual men prefer the opposite sex in romantic relationships; opposite in terms not only of genitalia, but also physical and other gender-related characteristics. For friendships, men may choose masculine or androgynous women as they may share similar traits, attitudes or hobbies as they do, and be able to participate in them, requiring an instrumental orientation. Male respect is a form of social power.¹⁷⁰ Franklin suggests that as a type of interpersonal attraction, respect implies a violation of reciprocity on the part of an actor or actors in social relationships. Male respect is a function of the possession of rare or valued attributes. Instrumental goals of a group or relationship are rewarded with respect. Most forms of respect are related to men, applicable to competition, authority, approval, dominance and so on. Interpersonal attraction between men, when labelled as "respect", is more permissible and acceptable. Thus, the source of attraction is instrumental, based on the contributions that an individual makes to another's personal goal attainment. Expectations of reciprocity or mutuality are then nullified. A positive evaluation of one man's abilities by another man, is enough reward, and does not need further demonstrations or affections, such as liking, which may be culturally unacceptable. It is also easier for men to respect one another, than to like one another, in light of the aggressiveness, competitiveness and dominance that masculinity encourages and fosters in males.

Due to women's liberation, men have had to grapple with respect in interpersonal communication with women, in situation-based relations. Women's increased participation in male-dominated groups has led to men being confronted with intersex respect. This respect can take numerous forms, such as respect in a woman's ability, or her "moral character". Women's contribution to group goals is not valued, however.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Franklin, C. W. 1984.

¹⁶⁷ Franklin, C. W. 1984.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

Male respect is instrumental, also it seems to be easy for men to substitute instrumentality for expressiveness. Physically attractive men are preferred in friendships between men, as they are thought to be more likely to enjoy the same sports activities, seen as possible assets in relationships with women, or will perform important instrumental functions for them.¹⁷¹ However, it has been suggested that men form longer lasting bonds with male friends, than women do with female friends; interestingly, men's friendships with other men are usually less intimate and personal than women's. Men prefer engaging in activities with other men, while women prefer conversing with their friends. Men are attracted to women whose presence may reduce their loneliness, stress, insecurity or anxiety, but rarely towards men (in an interpersonal sense) who have the same effect on them. Men gravitate towards other men who share similar ideas, values, attitudes, and who like to engage in similar activities; mutual expressiveness is not a necessary component. Women, in romantic relationships with men, are preferred to hold attitudes and values that agree with the ones held by the man, to be complementary to the man's.

3.5 Power, Inequality, and Truth

Any talk about men and women will invariably come to power at some point.¹⁷² The redistribution of power in society is a contentious point, perennially debated. Power is usually discussed, especially in social constructivism, as being the power that men have over women, or over other men, or the power that women have over women. Rarely, if ever, is power discussed as the power that women have over men.¹⁷³ Power is what often produces gender differences. Difference and domination are frequently explained in light of this issue. In social constructivism, difference is the result of domination, whereas in other theories it is often the result of sex differences. From the feminist standpoint, though, however traditionally one may decide to view it, men on the individual level rarely feel powerful.¹⁷⁴

Power can be construed in Game terms, as being more alpha, more competent in acquiring new beautiful female sexual partners and conquests, and being more in control of your life, be that financially, materially, physically, romantically, socially, and so on. This is power in relation to other men, power over other men, and power to obtain and interact with women of your choosing. Having said this, there is the mantra in the seduction community that in the end, the woman is the person who chooses, and the most that the man can do is present his best self to her, so that she can see him in his best light, and thus be the most inclined to sleep with him, than if he had not made the preparations intellectually, verbally, physically, socially, monetarily beforehand and before meeting her for the first time.

Power between or over men and women themselves can be seen as moot, as the sexes are complementary and not in opposition.¹⁷⁵ In an ideal world. Beta males, females, and alpha males can be seen as being in competition though. Power is often a group entity or exists socially.¹⁷⁶ Biological models describe how biological sex determines gender, and how innate biological differences lead to behavioral differences which lead to social arrangements.¹⁷⁷ Sex differences are also learned¹⁷⁸, and can be malleable.

Oppressive relations between sexes can be a form of sadism and masochism, dominant and submissive relationships that are motivated by desire for power, and subconsciously desired or fetishized.¹⁷⁹ These dynamics can be present at individual and at group levels, manifest in hierarchical relationships, and exhibiting mutual dependency. This situation, though, is constantly in flux. These can create crises cyclically, similar to and including, economic crises. Roles can be exchanged and reversed, too. In this sense, nothing is absolutely fixed. Desires for power, existential anxieties and insecurities emerging from freedom or oppression, shape social policies and systems.¹⁸⁰ The interrelation of factors and outcomes is complex. Bourdieu uses habitus as an explanation for some of these factors¹⁸¹, that is, a system of conditions and behaviors that are responsible for the status quo, and which come to be seen as 'natural', in a range of social fields. Stratification occurs within these fields, which individuals and groups need to navigate and negotiate the class and social possibilities contained within.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 98 – 100.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* "Most men, it seems, do not feel powerful." "[...] individual men are not "in power", and they do not feel powerful. Men often feel themselves to be equally constrained by a system of stereotypic conventions that leave them unable to live the lives to which they believe they are entitled." "The feeling of powerlessness is one reason why so many men believe that they are the victims of reverse discrimination and oppose affirmative action."

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 52.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 117.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

Men's rights movements can be what's termed as identity politics, and a reaction to the overfeminization of contemporary popular culture.¹⁸² Fears of feminization have plagued men for a few decades now, in a world with agentic women, absent fathers, overbearing mothers, and smothering political correctness.¹⁸³ When expressing emotions, men are seen to be weak, by other men, and unattractive by women. Game circumnavigates this by placing emotions into a strategic phase in the seduction model proposed by Mystery/Eric von Markovik. Kimmel decries this lack of emotion permitted in male expression and elevates women due to their relative freedom in this, while still demonizing any notions that men and women do have differences that may not always be overcome, no matter how equal or considered the setting may be.¹⁸⁴

Kimmel paints male assertive and aggressive sexuality as something to avoid and be ashamed of, whereas the success in the past couple of years of the novel, and now the success of the fiction book, '50 Shades of Grey', seem to belie this, and shows that a lot of women want to feel masculine dominance, at least in their emotional, romantic, relational and sexual lives. Meanwhile, financially, Wall Street in the 1980s was redefined in Social Darwinist terms as a place where only the fittest could survive, a compulsive masculinity, using bullying tactics in mergers and acquisitions.¹⁸⁵

Pleck (as cited by Franklin)¹⁸⁶ describes two kinds of power that women have in traditional male-female relationships. These are expressive power, and masculinity-validating power. Expressive power held by women, is the ability and freedom to express emotions and feelings that men and masculinity are not permitted to show. Therefore, many men express their emotions vicariously through women, and rely on women to feel emotionally alive and balanced, so that women have expressive power over them. Masculinity-validating power of women is the power that women have in playing certain roles that will make men feel good and powerful. Men need not only self-definitions of masculinity from other men, but also for women to tell them emotionally that they are members of the masculine gender. Women also can refuse to accept their submissive roles in an effort to make men feel bad.¹⁸⁷ The fact that women often determine if men feel masculine or non-masculine demonstrates the power that women have over men. The reciprocal nature of sex roles produces social power for females. It follows that power in social relationships may not be a zero sum game. Females have power over males in vital human areas. Men usually feel the need to prove themselves in all areas of social life, and to live up to male images constructed by society – which are often supported by women.¹⁸⁸ Women can often be used, wittingly or unwittingly, in competitive games with other men, and their need to strategize ways of destroying other men.

Men have been used by women. For example, they have been used as symbols of success and security by women, which can lead to feelings of self-doubt, self-hate and guilt in men.¹⁸⁹ A lack of power or agency in men's feelings is also evident – when, for instance, men who have internalized all that society says they should be, and yet are denied the opportunity to become that type of man. Much of the masculine role, perpetuated by both men and women alike, places men in a no-win situation.

Men have and had a reputation for being aggressive, dominant, war-like, in control, hostile and privileged.¹⁹⁰ In contrast, women's power has been historically in the west, more insidious and obscure. Some feminists¹⁹¹ try to advocate for an appropriation of men's style, that is, to be like men, more aggressive, intellectual, logical and competitive, while often at the same time calling for men to be more nurturing, caring, emotional, passive and warm. Others call for men to be androgynous, or denying their own masculinity, or discarding "negative" aspects of the male gender.

The Game, the concept of alpha men and the seduction community all vouch for a more traditional male role, as, historically, they say, and in pre-history, a man had to prove he could fight for, protect and provide for his mate and family, otherwise he would not be successful in finding a mate. Many women's reactions to men who show emotions, underline the validity of this theory.

Dominance over others should be lessened, feminists and pro-feminists argue, and the dismantling of hierarchies would also be beneficial for mankind, and men should become more like women.¹⁹² Aggression, they say, is a threat to social

¹⁸² Chancer and Watkins. 2006. pp. 12 and 13, 106.

¹⁸³ Kimmel, M. 1996. p. 321.

¹⁸⁴ Kimmel, M. 1996.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Franklin, C. W. 1984. Citing Pleck, 1976.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Franklin, C. W. 1984. p. 14.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.* p. 24.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*

integration and to human survival. Men are engaging in more domestic duties than before, and are even seen to be more nurturing to both boys and girls when in pre-school.

Individual life projects may find no stable ground on which to lodge themselves, uncertain and yet not limited to one's own talents.¹⁹³ Other human beings, and the Stranger, are conceived of as obstacles. Constructs of daily life are preselected and preinterpreted, so that no one builds his or her world from the start. This assumption outlines a similarity in others, and reciprocal perspectives, motives can be understood as relational, others have the qualities of subjects just like our own subjectivity. A state of perpetual beginning rests over all of us.¹⁹⁴ To be pure in the postmodern world calls for a love of difference, of competing styles and the capability of being seduced by infinite possibility and renewal promoted by the marketplace, delighting in putting on and taking off identities, chasing after more and more intense sensations and experiences.

Deregulation is constantly called for by the public from the state, to enhance consumer freedoms, privatize the use of resources, cutting taxes and so on. Yet law and order is also called upon to be more effective, in a paradoxical twist, to prevent the deregulated protests of the victims of deregulation and privatization. In practice, this means that those without consumer power or skills are kept at bay and marginalized, as they are deemed a drain on public funds and movement. These are players who are to be kept outside of the tournament. The logic of consumer freedom abounds, the consumption act is individualistic and absolute.

Freedom is a power relation.¹⁹⁵ A man is free if he can act according to his will and reach the results he wants to reach, if he cannot, then he is not free. Some people are inevitably restricted in their choices by the actions that they have taken, and they will fail to reach the results that they have wished for. Freedom can thus only be measured relatively, comparing it to others' ability to get what they want. So, freedom depends on who is stronger, who is most powerful, and on the distribution of wealth and resources and physical power and education which the effective action requires. People detach themselves from those others whom they perceive as having less power or worth than themselves, they resent these lesser people, and see them as clingy or needy, suffocating, enveloping and slowing them down, so that they must detach themselves from these lesser choiceless powerless people. The former see the world as an adventure playground, the latter experience the world as a trap. The poor are of no use to the consumer market, and deemed unfit to be free, in effect, excluded and utterly redundant.

Pleasure and power do not cancel each other out, according to Foucault.¹⁹⁶ Instead, they reinforce one another. Sex of husband and wife up until recently was governed by rules and obligations. Prohibitions on sex were of a juridical nature. Libertines were and are both admired and derided, from a mixture of fear and awe, and envy. The medicalization of the sexually peculiar was the effect and instrument of observatory, monitoring, repressive power and surveillance.¹⁹⁷ It is a game, Foucault says, of capture and seduction.

Confession has been relied upon in the west for centuries, for producing the truth (for example, the truth of sex).¹⁹⁸ As an act, confession frees, but power reduces it to a silence. Thus, there necessitated and happened the turn to discourse on sex. Such discourse happened and happens at the institutional and societal levels.

Still, Foucault asserts, that power is not (always) necessarily oppressive. Where there is desire, the power relation is already present, so that it is perhaps more useful to move towards an analytics of power, rather than a theory of power. Power's grasp on sex is propagated through language, through the act of discourse it creates, the articulation of sex, as a rule of law. The deployments of power are reduced to the procedure of the law of interdiction.¹⁹⁹ Power takes charge of men's living bodies, through normalization and technique. To create a new analytics of power, we must move away from its conception as a force and embodiment of law as a model and code, nor complete dominator force.

Power constitutes its own organization in a multiplicity of force relations, forming a chain or system, imbued with a condition of possibility. It is exercised from numerous points, and have a productive role, intentional and non-subjective in their relations. In this sense, there is no escaping power, as one is always inside it. The viewpoint of the objective is necessary in this conceptualization²⁰⁰; force relations and a strategical model, and in terms of sexuality, a deployment of alliance, which is being superseded by the production and deployment of sexuality.

¹⁹³ Bauman, Z. 1997.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Foucault, M. 1978.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.* "Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch." "... all form the correlate of exact procedures of power." "Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse."

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

3.6 Identity

Identity may be an essentialistic notion.²⁰¹ One which is reducible while remaining out of reach.²⁰² Foucault and Butler theorize in a politically organized way on identity precisely because it involves complex coalitions and ‘overlapping affiliations’.²⁰³ Differences exist alongside commonalities. Weber’s ‘iron cage’ of capitalism mourns the loss of humanism and the relentless work ethic of industrialization, bureaucracy and economization.²⁰⁴ Alienation is rampant among these societies. Bureaucracy leaves no room for spontaneity or individuality or expression, and seen in this light, can be inhumane and self-perpetuating.

This, Bauman writes, is the era of the counselling boom, where identities have fear and uncertainty in common and little else, where jobs can be taken away without prior notice, human bonds are unstable and fleeting, rapidly out of date and obsolete skill sets, and the ever present allure of consumerism.²⁰⁵ People’s internalized orientations keep being devalued and changed. How to assert yourself-books, counselling, identity problems, and personality healers characterize postmodernity for the individual. It is up to the individual to navigate these waters and to constantly choose what to do, without missing any opportunity. No one is ever satisfied or happy with the choices they make, in this context. Oaths of loyalty are resented, yet loneliness is abhorred, while a home is sought for, but locked doors or sitting still is horrific to the postmodern individual.

We are all tourists, in a sense, without thinking that we have a real right to reside or rest in any place, continually out of place where we are, constantly on the move. We constantly have to make choices in the face of uncertainty, of owning an unshared responsibility, feeling inadequate and perhaps missing out on what others are experiencing or doing better. Many people associate masculinity with toughness, insensitivity, independence and machismo.²⁰⁶ Gender is the primary indication of one’s identity, for most people. It is intriguing, then, that so many men need to define themselves in relation to what they are not, that is, feminine. Also, that so many men feel adrift without females in their life, or without sex with a female, can be seen as an insecurity and weakness in their armor.²⁰⁷ The meanings of masculinity are usually a function of three factors: the nature of the relationship between men and women, the nature of the relationship between men and other men, and the nature of the relationship between men and themselves.²⁰⁸

The most valued form of masculinity is the dominant hegemonic type, an answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, and establishes the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.²⁰⁹ Subordinated masculinity challenges the dominant or hegemonic forms through its behavior or attitudes. Gay men are one example of subordinated masculinity. Connell defines a third type of masculinity, ‘marginal masculinity’. This masculinity includes men who are alienated by class and racial disadvantages, and exert power over women in violent or extreme ways, to compensate for feelings of disrespect or resentment that they experience in other social arenas.²¹⁰

There can be some discrepancy between what men actually exhibit in their behavior, that is the characteristic that individual men are perceived as actually having, and attributes and behaviors that men should actually have. In other words, a difference between descriptive norms and sociocultural norms²¹¹, according to Thompson and Pleck. The term “male sex role” refers to the social norms that prescribe and proscribe what men should feel and do; these are the social expectations that men face, which can be assessed by examining attitudes towards the prescriptions and proscriptions that men encounter because of their sex.

Anti-femininity standards are a feature of the more dominant social norm governing men’s role, so that competence in manly things, an independent style of achievement, and incompetence in womanly/feminine things, are a feature. This seems to be converging in some respects, when we consider work, and also image, where the male cosmetic industry is growing every year, and has become a billion dollar industry itself now.

²⁰¹ Bauman, Z. 1997. p. 178. “It is the uncertainties focused on *individual identity*, on its never complete construction and on the ever attempted dismantling-in-order-to-reconstruct, which haunt modern men and women, leaving little space and time for the worries arising out of the *ontological* insecurity.”

²⁰² Chancer and Watkins. 2006. pp. 126 and 127.

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 98.

²⁰⁵ Bauman, Z. 1997.

²⁰⁶ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 18 and 19. See also, R. W. Connell.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Franklin, C. W. 1984.

²⁰⁹ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 71 and 72.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 25 and 26.

Seeking achievement and suppressing emotions are another feature of the imperatives of the male role.²¹² Being cool, level-headed, dominant in interpersonal relationships, active, and achievement-oriented, are other general features. Achieving status in social and personal standing, is another noteworthy element, as is self-confidence, aggression and independence, risk taking, control, strong and self-supporting. Of course, not all men concur with, nor reject, these elements, but it is reasonable to say that these are fairly static and prevalent parameters of standards in “real” masculinity. Some individuals can endorse (or reject) traditional attitudes towards men (or women), and at the same time endorse (or reject) liberal/progressive attitudes towards women (or men).²¹³ Which men endorse which standards, needs to be further researched.

When women’s expectations of men, combined with hierarchical power relations, sexual intimacy and emotional connection, can leave men unsure of their place in both the world and in standing with women.²¹⁴ Women are currently in possession of economic, social and emotional independence from men. Men’s relative retaining of structural power gives them some leverage still in heterosexual relationships. In the case of men wanting to learn Game, they either have never had, or have had too little leverage in interactions with women, and want to gain more, or they have been relatively or quite successful with women already, and want to improve their seduction skills to be even more successful. Furthermore, men differ with regard to the amount of support (physically, economically and socially) they can offer a woman, and women respond differently to different types of men.²¹⁵ These men may want to be more traditional and occupy a breadwinner role, while others avoid that and cite women’s freedom and ability to work as egalitarian proof of the lessening of need for economic dependence on men.

Still, it has been shown that women who earn a lot of money, typically partner with men who earn more than they do, so that this dynamic is still in play, even if the woman is liberated.²¹⁶ Still, there is the fragility and increasingly impermanent nature of heterosexual partnerships, leading to men and women being single for life, or to have serially monogamous partnerships. Women may find (beta) males to help with child rearing, however.²¹⁷ In this arena, women want men to work equally with them on raising children, or they often do not want children at all. The role that men play in women’s lives has changed. Lifetime emotional and financial security from men is rarer for women now, due to rising rates of permanent singledom, divorce, cohabitation, postponed marriage, and separation. Larger social changes are providing women with new sources of power, but they are also bringing new insecurities and vulnerabilities. Male reactions to this vary, according to how much they support or oppose new and increasing demands from women. It may depend on what he has to gain from such social change. In other cases, the change is so great that he just has to adapt to it and accept it.²¹⁸ Differences between traditional and nontraditional people have become as socially and politically significant as differences between men and women.

The sensitive new age man, praised by critics and feminists, starting in the late 1970s but really coming into their own in the 1980s and 1990s, was seen as progressive for men.²¹⁹ In reality, it left men confused and unattractive to the opposite sex, and provided the conditions for the seduction community and Game to flourish in later years. Getting “in touch with [their] feminine side” meant that such men were indecisive and lacked sexual agency. Women did not like this.²²⁰ These men came to be seen as wimps as time went on. They lacked a sense of purpose. They were effeminate, or at best androgynous. They were too nice. Too considerate of women’s feelings. Some women thus openly regretted their demands that men become more openly expressive. Culture too swung in the opposite direction again, with the rise of macho rock and hip hop extolling the virtues of being a “pimp” and of unrestrained swagger and bravado. The question of what is a real man, became more pertinent and the early 2000s progressed.

Presidential elections are a playground of manhood assertion, according to Kimmel, and the sets much of the tone for the nation, and indeed the western hemisphere, as a whole.²²¹ The field has changed, with the liberation of women, and their entering into almost every facet of social club that once belonged to men. The transforming workplace, the decline of skilled workers, corporate relocations, the entry of women into positions of power, their agency and voice in media, academia, the military and politics – all of these factors combine to make men unsure of exactly who it is that they are, and who they should be.

²¹² *ibid.*

²¹³ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 34.

²¹⁴ Gerson, K. in Kimmel, M. S. 1987.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

²¹⁷ *ibid.* “Those women who decided to combine work and motherhood found male partners who both wanted children and supported female partners’ work careers.”

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Kimmel, M. 1996.

²²⁰ *ibid.* p. 294.

²²¹ *ibid.*

Due to accusations of rape or sexual harassment, many men are afraid to show sexual confidence and conquest. They experience a fear of flirting, in case it is misunderstood and provides the basis for allegations against them.²²² The self-made man, the real man, the alpha man, are in short supply, and yet are experience a renaissance, with the proliferation of men's groups, self-help literature, websites, seduction courses and companies, and so on.²²³ "Feminazis" and oppressive bureaucracy stifles these men, and they look for ways to assert their manhood, either through creating new rituals, or reviving older traditions. Men feel slighted by unbalanced child custody laws, guilt over their being men which has been fostered on them by feminists, and what they feel as their rights being taken away. They even, to a certain extent, feel sexually harassed by women.²²⁴

The Self-Made Man model of manhood, as a marker of success as men, a recipe of self-control, exclusion and escape, leads mostly to chronic anxiety and insecurity, according to Kimmel.²²⁵ Men grow from boys, but boys are not seen, in the genderized schema, to be individuals per se.²²⁶ The male socialization process is complex, and includes such elements as a child's primary group of parents, relatives, friends and other children, schools, religious institutions, media, toys, sports, clothes and others. This process is to acquire the physical, mental and social skills that a males needs to survive and become a man in the eyes of society. Stereotypes can also proliferate in these environments and from these sources.

In childhood, greater pressure is exerted on males than on females to conform to the standards and remain in the parameters of appropriate sex-role behavior; to learn how to maintain and perpetuate the society. People hold certain expectations and behave in certain ways towards male infants. These expectations and behaviors can support the development of certain traits and characteristics in males, something that is considered to be a profound influence by social scientists. Cognitive influences are also thought to influence the process whereby males become men. Society emphasizes traditional masculine traits and devalues most feminine traits exhibited in males. The existence of early sex differences both behaviorally, sensorally and biologically have been documented, with males showing more irritability and sleeping less, more independent, more affected by stress, and distressed when separated from their mother.²²⁷ They are also seen to be more coordinated, stronger and more alert. These findings could also possibly be attributed to different socialization methods employed by the parents, depending on the sex of the child; that is, of adult behavior exhibited towards infants and children.

The term "role" can be explained as a shorthand conception that embraces expectations and obligations.²²⁸ We can be locked into a social order through reciprocal social roles; interpersonal relationships are some function of linkages between social role relationships, both have obligations and expectations. Language plays a part in this, and "having" or "had", with regards to being with a woman sexually, convey the sense of triumph and overcoming (of a difficult task) and having reaped the benefits and prize; language conveys that certain things are possible, and can lead to the acquisition of attitudes that can make (strategic or beneficial) action or behavior a reality. The ideal-type male is thus conveyed through key words and phrases, indicating the functions, traits and activities that befit a real man. Male domination of other men is partially learned this way, for example.²²⁹

Labels for certain male youth such as "wimp", "sissy", "faggot", "weakling" and so on, can be fostered by parents, educational spaces, social environments and play areas (both online and in real life), so that boys and men are encouraged to dominate other boys and men, and to avoid association (except in a sexually dominant and achievement-based way) with women; similar to this is the language employed in sports, where dominating teams are showered with praise, accolades, attention and affection. This behavior extends into adulthood, with occupational and financial domination, and other male domination of other males. Some societal institutions encourage and support these forms of interaction. Controlling of self is a key tenant of masculinity: To be able to control nature, one must control himself first. Logical thought, intellect, an internalized Calvinist work ethic and physical strength are important traits to have. This leads men to believe and aspire to the notion that they can control any situation, and themselves, physically, mentally, emotionally and behaviorally. It also leads men to believe that they are responsible for all situations, those between males and females, males and other males, and themselves and others.

The male self²³⁰ refers to the process whereby males, by taking the roles of others, view themselves and behave towards themselves as social objects. From this process comes self-knowledge, self-conceptions, self-esteem, and so on.

²²² *ibid.*

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ *ibid.* "Advocates of "men's rights" [...] claim [...] that women have already achieved equality and that programs that favor women now serve to discriminate against men."

²²⁵ *ibid.*

²²⁶ Franklin, C. W. 1984. 29.

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ *ibid.* Citing Zanden, V. 1977.

²²⁹ *ibid.*

²³⁰ *ibid.* p. 64.

Correlated to this, males form conceptions of how they appear to others – females and other males. They form conceptions (based on real or perceived feedback) about others' judgments of their actions and appearance, and develop attached feelings of shame, pride, self-esteem and so on in response. Living up to the male ideal image is all-important. So the male forms beliefs dependent on whether they appear to others to be masculine, his appearance being conceptually formed on masculine traits such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, dominance, control, and so on. These conceptions of self-enable men to form conceptions of others' judgment of their appearances and behavior. The drive to be enough, in all of these traits, to measure up, is constant and encompassing. Self-esteem is contingent and appropriated to how well or how poorly these traits in the man are judged by others.

Male's self-conceptions are affected by the culture's differential valuation of sex-roles – a significant amount of a male's self-conception hinges on whether his constructed image is sufficiently distant from general conceptions of the feminine and female behavior.²³¹ To be associated with the feminine in this context is to be judged negatively. Many men feel concern over their masculinity and are affected psychologically by this. Some ways to overcompensate for these perceived deficiencies include workaholic routines and aggressive sexual behavior, to gain access to the arena of socially acceptable actions; linked to this is the man's sexual self-concept that is a core feature of his self-concept, influencing his direction and aspects of his life.

Participation in structural social interaction, invoking an identity, having that identity recognized and validated socially, one's relationship to particular sets of people dependent on being a particular type of person, and identity structure and role performance, link to form identity parameters, and self-esteem influences, based on the model that Stryker uses. Role-taking and socialization in this model lead to identity formation based on societal definitions; these identities then need to be validated in order not to exist in a vacuum. Conforming behavior that reflect social norms and values, leads to self-esteem. The masculine identity is one of commitment to the ideal. This leaves no room for tenderness or self-doubt, compassion, empathy, because males negate these traits due to their association with weakness and femininity. Franklin posits that men are resultantly against themselves, and their own humanness.

3.7 Men's Perceptions

Part of the reason that Game exists, is due to groupthink, social conditioning, and lack of perceptions of what is really "behind the veil" when it comes to male-female interaction and the dating scene. Men want to find out how dating works, in specific ways, not rely on truisms, and they want to see what truly composes reality. The processes of how these perceptions are thought to be formed and operate, can be affected by many different factors, and social dynamics such as action, reaction and interaction between people.²³² According to Franklin, most male's perceptions of their social worlds are a function of how they organize their social worlds. Such organization can revolve around proximity, similarity and continuity. In the seduction community, value and pre-selection demonstrations are key in the creation of and maintenance of social circles.

Game posits that with self-determination and self-improvement, you can have techniques which will help to build social circles and affect people's perceptions, including your own. Social science differs somewhat, and says that these factors are often thought to be beyond the control of individual males, and to be factors that the male imposes on his social world. Factors affecting male perceptual organization include knowledge of role options, mental states, role making or role playing strategies, and personal communication techniques. Understanding other's possible places in these factors is also necessary.²³³

Male knowledge of role options is learned early, and is a process involving social perception, past experience, contemporary experience and even anticipated situations. Mental states are encouraged and expected to be logical, rational and systematic; accurate measurement of one's achievements and the achievements of others is an asset. Men's perceptions of their social worlds are dynamic, changeable and unpredictable. Accurate social perception, which may be counter-intuitive, requires more intuitive-passive thought (which is often linked with femininity), and see the actual social structures for what they are, and not the expected social structures.

Franklin posits²³⁴ that masculine properties are a function of properties within social interaction, which support the ideal male image and behavior. Additionally, emphasis on masculine traits and past role-playing and role-making experiences are sources that males draw from when constructing their behaviors in social interaction, which in turn affects their perception of other men and women, and vice versa. It has been found that men perceive more competitiveness in social

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² Franklin, C. W. 1984. pp. 79 – 102.

²³³ *ibid.*

²³⁴ *ibid.*

interaction, than women do. Personal communication techniques and styles also influence male social perception, by filtering information.

The way in which an individual organizes his world will be related to this filtering process, which has implications for impression forming (the process whereby we make conclusions about traits, moods and attributes of others), impression management (the regulation of self-disclosure information) and face to face interactions and social situations. These are social-psychological phenomena related to social perception.²³⁵ The decoding abilities and non-verbal communication and reading which accompanies interactions, is thought to be more easily executed by females, rather than males, primarily due to socialization processes, however, more masculine people can have such abilities in assessing non-verbal cues and emotions, due to needing to be effective in interpersonal interactions, such as leading, and winning in competition. The effects can range from physical attraction, primary-recency, halo effects and stereotyping effects. How men present themselves in social interaction with both males and females, is one of the primary concerns of Game, and has these aforementioned correlates of male social perception.

Males perceive physically attractive females as sexually warm, friendly, kind, and sexual attraction is related to physical attractiveness. This effect is greater for males, than it is for females.²³⁶ The sex of the person is the first thing that is registered. Cognitions are said to affect our perceptions, and subsequent information becomes part of our first impression. This can bias impressions, where males can think that women are less intelligent, strategic or covert than they actually are, for example. Large differences can exist between how men and women perceive others' sex behaviors.

How males present themselves in social interactions with others affects others' perceptions of them. Some can go to great lengths to control or manipulate information about themselves. Males exhibit emotional intimacy and heterosexual tendencies and affection in social interaction with females, which can be instrumental and/or functional²³⁷, which may be designed to manage a particular function; although men can be either passive or active with women. Men may concurrently perceive women as demanding an active man. The degree to which reciprocity in self-disclosure is felt by either party, is relative to the amount of comfort and situation, information and other's self-disclosure. There can be a reluctance to expose oneself, however in a lot of cases, if there are no huge cultural differences, self-disclosure usually matches that of the other party. Homosexism when men are spending time with other men, refers to tendencies in many males to inhibit certain feelings and behaviors towards other males.

These may have some links, though not necessarily, to homophobia. This may stem from fear of being labelled a homosexual, or a fear that they will see in other males, physical attributes that are superior to their own. Masculine role expectations such as competitiveness, winning individualism and aggressiveness, combine to strengthen this denial of other men's physical beauty, especially when such beauty gives competitors an edge in a culture where physical beauty bestows rewards and counts a lot.

Most men categorize other men in terms of whether their external cues of masculinity meet their own expectations of how men behave and look, and look for cues that will validate or invalidate these expectations, for example of toughness, competitiveness, strength, and so on.²³⁸ Impression formation is based on these cues. It follows, that similar to when with females, men control and manage the information that they reveal about themselves to other men. Just as when with women, men seek validation of their masculinity from other men also. Males tend to give enforced masculine performances when other males are present. Showing emotions, however, is verboten. Masculine topics of conversation are preferred when in the company of other men.

Behaviors affect perceptions and vice versa. Males and females can experience mixed messages from each other. Men are supposed to adhere to traditional roles, while also expanding upon them, in effect, incorporating everything in a post-modern identity [see Guardian article]

Men are expected to be both sensitive *and* decision makers.²³⁹ Due to increased shared roles in society and in relationships, men feel both ostracized and subsumed, invisible and in need of some way of demarcating themselves and proving their worth. Self-fulfilment and self-realization are seen as important pursuits in today's culture.

Constant communication and expressiveness in relationships is prescribed in order for them to function and be healthy, but this is at odds with men's inexpressiveness and reticence with regard to showing emotions. Men are still concerned with earning more than their partners, and will more readily assume to do tasks outside of the household or relationship.

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ *ibid.* p. 107.

3.8 Male Sexuality

In much of sociology and social studies, the terms sex, gender and gender identity refer to specific qualities. Sex refers to the biological aspects of a person such as chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical, and physiological structures.²⁴⁰ Gender refers to an achieved (social) status that is a function of socialization and has social, cultural and psychological components; direct and indirect experiences, formal and informal learning, and conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Gender identity, lastly, is some function of the interaction between self-identification and others' identification; identifying as masculine or feminine, regardless of sex, through interactions with themselves and others. It is debatable whether someone who identifies with a gender, once they convince someone else that they are that particular gender, it then becomes real to that person; therefore, gender identity refers to an individual's view or belief that he or she belongs to a particular gender, "confirmed" and supported by the identification of others and by self-identification.

Friendship and love seem to have become feminized, and sexuality has become masculinized, according to Kimmel.²⁴¹ Pleasure is pursued for its own sake, sexual prowess and hedonism is becoming de facto the norm, women are bragging almost as much as men about sexual conquests, sexual partners have increased in number, experience is held as an end in itself, sexual experimentation has almost become normative, and having sex has been separated almost completely from love or expectations of continuing romantic relationships.²⁴² Technological advances such as the internet and birth control account for some of these changes, as does the increasing explicitness and openness of some media outlets. The sexual revolution with its promise of freedom and less emotional and physical attachment and consequences has also played a role.²⁴³

In the seduction community, there is an active discouragement of 'slut shaming', as the freer females are with their sexuality, the better it is for men and women alike. This is not universally held as a standard in the community, though, and men are still seen as studs and women as being either frigid or as sluts in many aspiring PUA bulletin board discussions online. Men must advance the sexual situation, and women must resist it, to protect their reputation. Also, they must safeguard, traditionally, their fertility, for the 'right man' to come along, who would stick around while a child would be raised. In the seduction community, as in evolutionary biology and psychology circles, this situation is accounted for by our ancestors living in small tribes of 50 to 100 people, and everyone knowing everyone else's business, having rights to certain females, and so on.

In sociology, theorists such as Kimmel purport that the sexual double standard – that of promiscuous men being praised, and promiscuous women being derided or shunned – is a result of gender inequality.²⁴⁴ This is reinforced in the way that men are presumed to be more sexual than women. The seduction community does mention this issue, and clarifies that women are indeed often times *more* sexual than men. With such views where sex is controlled by women, and it becomes a contest between men and over women, sex loses its connection, becomes an object and fetishized itself, and sexual pleasure can be seen and experienced as a man's victory over a woman's resistance.²⁴⁵

These rules of what constitutes 'good girls' and 'sexual minimalism' are enforced not just by men, but by other women, and by church, state and school. Sex, in the seduction community, is most highly valued when intercourse occurs. This bears out in the general male population also, which can be termed "phallogentric".²⁴⁶ When thinking about and imagining sex, men and women generally follow gender when composing sexual scripts – women's being more sensual imaginings, and men's being more sexual. This reveals that what we think and what we think we should think, is often rigid and scripted.²⁴⁷

Kimmel describes gendered sexual socialization²⁴⁸, that is, the goals, as mentioned previously, for men and women, in sexual encounters and in first encounters in general, are usually different. Men's objective is 'to score' and to escalate the interaction, to show initiative and take action, her objective may be pleasure, but her 'good girl' or 'anti-slut'

²⁴⁰ Franklin, C. W. 1984.

²⁴¹ Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 238 – 253.

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ *ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

programming or defenses, may kick in to slow down or prevent escalation of the interaction.²⁴⁹ The future tense and strategizations often take precedence over the present, in these situations. Intimacy and pleasure may not be the fully intended outcomes of these interactions, as enhancing or preserving reputations within peer groups may heavily contribute to each other's actions and behaviors.²⁵⁰

Peer pressure has been found, as Kimmel states, to be most prevalent among males. Seeing non-relational sex as a problem is a recent phenomenon, that is, pursuing sexual pleasure for its own sake.²⁵¹ As long as the consent is mutual, there should be no problem with such behavior, in an egalitarian society, and where (in western democratic societies at least) there is already a significant convergence among men and women with regard to sexual practices and romance and mate selection.²⁵²

Traditional definitions of masculinity are being renewed in the seduction community – a reaction against the disenfranchisement that men felt in the wake of the feminine revolution and the trend that began in full force in the 1990s to get men to be in touch with and express their feminine sides. Instead of being assertive around women, men were encouraged to let women make the first move, to walk around women as if they were tiptoeing on broken eggshells. This did both men and women a disservice, and has led to so many men needing guidance and coaching on how to pick up women. Kimmel has another point of view, however, and says that men should be expressing even more of their vulnerable sides.²⁵³ He does, however, acknowledge the other side of the coin, and the growing numbers of men's movements. Societies do class people according to gender, and there has been great debate on whether this is innately biological, as in biological determinism, or, as Kimmel asserts, cultural and patriarchally enforced, through differential socialization.²⁵⁴

The division of labor by sex and gender is another contested topic. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment too much more on this, suffice it to say, that the seduction community leans on the evolutionary biological side of things. Men and women are different, not just anatomically, but also mentally, emotionally and behaviorally, and in the effort to assert equality, many feminists and a great swath of society itself, has lost sight of this, and seeks to somehow wash over any differences. These differences must be addressed, though, and in marketing terms, the seduction community is filling a niche in the market that did not have a solution before, or at the very least, did not have a methodical or well thought out solution. Sex and gender have been separated in terms of meanings, yet, in a fundamental way, if a man desires to sleep with a beautiful and feminine woman, he will need to possess or fake alpha qualities in order to bed her. His masculinity will need to be proven, to her, and to her friends, and the surrounding others. Kimmel proposes that greater difference lies among men and among women, than between them²⁵⁵, and that gender difference is the result of gender inequality. Gender, according to Kimmel, is a central organizing principle around which social life revolves, and through which we understand our own experiences.²⁵⁶ Feminist scholarship underlines that gender is a central tenant of women's lives.²⁵⁷ Masculinity studies, by comparison, are sparse and hard to find. Yet, Kimmel maintains, it is because gender is not so relevant to men, that it underlines the power that men are privileged with, in that they do not need to think so much about gender, it is an invisible issue to them, that power is often invisible.²⁵⁸ I would point to the rise of men's movements, and say that it is no longer the case that gender is not an issue for men, if indeed it used to be before. There are, no doubt, existing genders, masculinities and femininities, which change over space and time. This is irrefutable.

It still stands, though, that the genetic prizes go to those males who exhibit the most alpha traits, and can access the most beautiful and coveted females. Kimmel refers to this, when quoting sociologist R. W. Connell, as a type of "emphasized masculinity", that is, a hegemonic hyper-normative definition of what it means to be a good, perfect, valid and successful male.²⁵⁹

Evolutionary theory, sociobiology, evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology all support this main structure. The biological principal, as espoused by Edward Wilson²⁶⁰, describes the pressure that organisms face during evolutionary selection, and are the source of the social arrangements in place today. Consciously or unconsciously, we

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² *ibid.*

²⁵³ Kimmel, M. 2004. pp. 290 – 294. "Some men express their frustration and confusion by hoping and praying for a return to the old gender regime [...] [O]thers join various men's movements".

²⁵⁴ Kimmel, M. 2004.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 5.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 7.

²⁵⁹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 10.

²⁶⁰ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 25.

want to pass on our genes, and to have a legacy. Evolutionary strategies and choices lead to the propagation and continuation of the species. Males are more hardwired to be the hunters, and females more hardwired to be choosy in who they make a biological investment with, according to sociobiologist Donald Symons.²⁶¹

Men are at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to relationships, as they must initiate sexual contact. Sex is a confirmation, then of one's own masculinity or femininity²⁶², and the accompanying behaviors, attitudes and traits. Sexuality itself, biologically or socially, is always influenced by human reality, and can be molded in human society²⁶³ and analyzed by a cultural analysis. Kimmel sees our choices as being socially and culturally determined, as much as, if not more than, by biological imperatives, and by our sense of identity and place within the world.

Reproductive rights and the issue of abortion and control of women's bodies are issues which feminism has long been concerned with, namely that patriarchal forces seek to repress and control female biology.²⁶⁴ Reproductive choice was seen as a major step in breaking free of this patriarchal dominance. So, too, is women's ability to assert control over their own bodies, seen as determining the power or lack thereof of patriarchy in society and over women. From this example, we clearly see that the personal is political.

This bringing to light of issues that radical feminism caused, made men's behavior in the home and in sexual relationships be reevaluated. The personal as political can diminish esteem for one person if, though being successful in one area of life, is inappropriate in another, the growing unacceptability of upholding values in one sphere of life that are contradicted in another sphere – an idea that is increasingly seen in cultural consciousness.²⁶⁵ Still, relationships between men and women are seen in terms of dominance and subordination. Structure versus agency debates within feminism over oppression and patriarchal domination still continue, where a more synthetic, stratified (that is, exploration of social dimensions in overlapping layers relative to one another), holistic and less heated argument may be more helpful.²⁶⁶

It is through sexuality, according to Fine²⁶⁷, that men demarcate their social world, and keep women out. It is indisputable that masculinity is intimately tied to sexuality. Sexuality informs gender, and vice versa. Sexual performance is one of the crucial arenas in which masculinity is socially constructed and enacted. Herek notes²⁶⁸ that heterosexual masculinity hinges on demonstrable sexual orientation and distancing from perceived femininity. Due to this, performance failure can be devastating to masculinity, and challenge the "realness" of men.

Kimmel too, suggests that male sexuality operates on a performance principle, and not a pleasure principle.²⁶⁹ This is debatable. He ties this in with work performance and the drive to be more efficient and effective. An experience of powerlessness and alienation has led men to search for affirmation outside the workplace. Feminism has tried to reverse the laws of nature, by trying to get men to be non-aggressive during sex, for example.²⁷⁰ Male dominance is a given in sexual relations, yet these radical feminists ignored this, along with demanding special protections and privileges for women, attacking masculinity itself unchecked. Men's groups advocate for removal of discrimination in custody battles, for the rights to choose if a woman has an abortion, and also for women to have military service, and an end to antimale sexism and male bashing.²⁷¹ Kimmel writes dismissively of these crusades.

While feminism has given more rights to women, men still pay alimony and child support, fight wars, initiate sexual relationships. Some argue that feminism is the most insidious form of sexism.²⁷² The disconnect between what we are led to expect when meeting the opposite sex: fidelity, compassion, warmth, sexual satisfaction, equality – is shattered by the real world and by the fact that things are not as movies, books, or indeed common discourse among members of society and media, would have you believe.

3.9 Initiation Rituals, Rites of Passage and Liminality

There are rituals that are associated with gender, where it is socially constructed. Reproduction and child rearing determine gender difference and inequality. These formal ritual rites of passage have mostly been abandoned in

²⁶¹ *ibid.* See also David Barash, and Thornhill and Craig Palmer, Richard Alexander and K. M. Noonan, Steven Goldberg.

²⁶² Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 48.

²⁶³ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 50.

²⁶⁴ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 34.

²⁶⁵ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 36.

²⁶⁶ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. pp. 11 and 114.

²⁶⁷ Kimmel, M. S. 1987. p. 18 and 19.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ Kimmel, M. 1996. p. 283.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 301.

²⁷¹ *ibid.* p. 302.

²⁷² *ibid.* p. 305.

Western democratic states.²⁷³ Circumcision can be a way to transition into manhood and assert male dominance.²⁷⁴ There are some, such as Fisher, who argue that humanity in the West is slowly returning to the hunter gatherer days, where the sexes were equal, and men and women working equally outside and inside the home, and having external partners, was more the norm.²⁷⁵ Then again, there is no evidence of there ever having been truly egalitarian societies.²⁷⁶ We are active agents in our own socialization, and our gender socialization and decisions continue throughout our lives, according to Kimmel²⁷⁷, reacting in appropriation to different circumstances that one finds oneself in socially, and one's own prior experience. The social environment is filled with gendered messages, signs and actions,²⁷⁸ production and reproduction, occupational systems and kinship systems, encounters with other people and social institutions. Men can enter a cult of 'compulsive masculinity', in their desire to become a 'bad boy' and separate from the mother and all that is feminine and good.²⁷⁹ This 'bad boy' or 'alpha' persona, is what is attractive to a large majority of hyperfeminized women. However, boys do not have adequate role models for this 'bad boy' persona, unlike girls do for the 'good girl' persona, which is readily available with their mothers. Still, situationally, gender is plural and relational, Kimmel writes.²⁸⁰ It changes as the situation changes. Questions of politics, power and conflict must not be forgotten in these scenarios, according to Stacey and Thorne.²⁸¹ In opposition to others is how hegemonic versions of masculinity are established, as gender is a property of institutions as much as it is individuals, according to Kimmel.²⁸² Identity, interaction and institution are constantly at play, gendered people in gendered societies. Inequality between men and women is thus legitimated institutionally, through difference and domination. For example, male heterosexuals often spend a lot of time and energy in masculine display and proving that they have had sex with women, to show that they are not homosexual.²⁸³

Men are not finding meaning in the workplace as much as they used to, writes Kimmel²⁸⁴, their isolation and self-estrangement leads them to search for identity in the realm of consumption. Constant demonstration of one's adequacy is an "essential part of the system", as it proves one's independence.²⁸⁵ The pressure to be a breadwinner is a source of strain and conflict, not pride or motivation. Loneliness and emptiness results from men's perceived status as cogs in the corporate machine. The blind pursuit of a marketplace masculinity has reduced men to literally the sum of their parts, become docile and dependent, with unrealized potential. Heroes and the hero myth are still popular, perhaps as a way to escape a mundane existence, or to dare to dream of a different life than the one afforded to most men. This is evinced in the popularity of Marvel and DC superhero and comic based movies of the last decade. The hardy manhood²⁸⁶, as Kimmel terms it, is still longed for, in the emasculated bureaucratic existence that most men in the western world live, and previously exemplified by explorers, hunters, pioneers, cowboys, military men, astronauts, and now entrepreneurs. Compulsive competitiveness may point to a state of permanent liminality in today's society, a state that is difficult to break out of and convincingly retain an acceptable form of masculinity. Fear of appearing effeminate can lead some men to overcompensate, to dangerous extents, as Kimmel writes on US history, using examples such as president Johnson's refusal to exit Vietnam for fear of seeming weak and like a "sissy", and Nixon's reluctance to appear soft on Communism.²⁸⁷

Pleck, as cited in Kimmel²⁸⁸, writes that personal and political are merged in questions of manhood, calls the male sex role a fraud (as stated by Kimmel), and that patriarchy oppresses some men as well as women, so that men who are around other men are felt to have to match each other in terms of masculinity, and to always fear their possessions or mates being taken away, being attacked, victimized, or ultimately murdered by other men. Couple this with the new fears that post-modern men have with no sense of solace in traditional monogamous relationships, liberated and hypersexualized women, we see men in a precarious position socially, in flux and distressed existentially at present. The contradictory role that men are supposed to embody, leads them to an impossible to live up to standard, such as the

²⁷³ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 61.

²⁷⁴ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 62.

²⁷⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 70.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 80.

²⁷⁸ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 87 and 88, also, see Talcott Parsons.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 97.

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

²⁸² Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 101 and 102. "To say, then, that gender is socially constructed requires that we locate individual identity within a historically and socially specific and equally gendered place and time, and that we situate the individual within the complex matrix of our lives, our bodies, and our social and cultural environments."

²⁸³ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 257.

²⁸⁴ Kimmel, M. 1996. p. 264.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 285.

“remain cool” but simultaneously “give em hell” attitudes.²⁸⁹ A constant level of stress thus infiltrates men’s very being. Men who conform to the stereotypic definition do not seem to be much more confident in themselves as real men, Kimmel states. In light of this, Pleck proposes the Male Sex Role Strain model, which places contradiction, tension and anxiety in the center of men’s efforts in demonstrating masculinity.²⁹⁰

In contemporary culture, as mentioned previously, there are not many official rites of passage, from boyhood into manhood. Some faux rites have come into existence, such as ritual hazing practiced in American university campuses by fraternity organizations, as a way for non-members to earn membership of a group.²⁹¹ Hazing usually involves activities that humiliate, abuses, degrades or endangers the person who is participating and wishing to gain entrance to the group. Such activities are often illegal. These are voluntarily undertaken, and so authorities do not notice or often do not have much say in the matter. To refuse to undergo hazing, often means cultural marginalization and lack of entry to groups. Examples of hazing include binge drinking alcohol, and physical fighting, verbal taunts, branding, torture and scarification. Some rituals, though supposedly comprised of homophobic taunting, are actually homoerotic, such as the ‘circle jerk’. Alcohol is seemingly ubiquitous in this regard, and if you do not drink, your manhood and even loyalty is questioned.

Every move, gesture and gestures is monitored by self-appointed judges, cameras, social networks, surveillance videos, and so on. Performance is a constant. Men want to be liked and accepted into the culture, into the social life. Through this, the attainment of self-worth, power, validation as a man, is seen to be possible. There is a covert rage, that is hidden beneath the surface, as men rail against societies’ rules and structures, but try to adhere to other rules self-imposed and invented by various groups.

Initiation is about moving from one status to another. Although it is now known that personality is not as stable as previously thought, the power of liminality and rites of passage is that one’s current identity is unstable, and initiation is undergone in order to stabilize a new permanent identity. Freud’s Oedipal crisis describes such an event. Victor Turner coined the term ‘liminality’ for this unstable moment, a floating undefinable no-man’s land, which is overseen by custom, law and ceremony.²⁹² Boyhood can be seen as belonging to the world of women, which boys must leave, in order to become men. Without such rituals, men in contemporary society are experiencing a type of permanent drift or directionless fog in which they are trying to define and establish who they are, in some measurable way. Now, peers are trying to initiate peers, when, traditionally, it was only those in authority, already men, could do so.

3.10 Sex and Love

Men and women have different experiences and expectations when it comes to friendship, love and sex. These realms are also organized by gender, Kimmel states.²⁹³ The differences between the sexes is not always what is expected, and is constantly changing. Relationships are formed unconsciously and consciously, shaped by our reactions to and conceptions of gender.²⁹⁴ Love’s meaning changes over history, as does gender and friendship.²⁹⁵ Cultural norms and property arrangements heavily influence this, although expressions of passion attachment between people, especially youth, happen in most societies. Women have come to be seen as more knowledgeable about love, however, when it comes to attraction, it is males, and seduction gurus, that seem to have the practical know-how on how to create situations that are beneficial or mutually beneficial.²⁹⁶ The prevalence of women writers on love has made it so that men’s expressions and ways of loving have become devalued. Providing for and protecting, sexual passion and mutual aid are not valued as highly anymore. Love as a prerequisite for sexual or romantic or marital relations, is a recent phenomenon, and a Western one at that. It is feminized in that it has come to mean helplessness, irrationality, beauty, tenderness, homeliness. Also, an ignoring of physical aspects of love, emphasis on feeling and talking, and nurturing. Men’s rough, wild and competitive natures at work necessitated a repression of these feelings. As, too, their ways of loving which include shared activities, sex, practical help and spending time together. Recent studies, though, show a more similar conception of love held by the sexes, than previously.²⁹⁷ Men, it seems, are simultaneously more cynical and more romantic about love, than women are. Women, on the other hand, seem to experience love more intensely, at least in the first stages of love. Women initiate the majority of breakups, despite the fact that men fall both in love and out of love more quickly than women. Men experience more hardship and hurt after a breakup than women, and women

²⁸⁹ *ibid.* p. 286.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*

²⁹¹ *ibid.*

²⁹² *ibid.*

²⁹³ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 213.

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 225.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 227.

move on faster with their lives, enter new relationships faster, and see their former romantic partners as friends more easily, than men do.²⁹⁸

Women and men now marry or date more for love than anything else, in the West.²⁹⁹ Men's style of loving, enhanced by societal structures, and women's, contribute to women feeling in love longer than men, and men feeling like they cannot be in love for as long. The structural impact of the modern family unit leads to these discrepancies between men and women, enhancing and inhibiting relational styles. Men's ways of expressing love in such arrangements may simply not fit. A solution to this, suggests Kimmel, would be the encouragement of a more mutually supportive, yet individually developing, self-exploring and intimate type of love.³⁰⁰ Friendships, meanwhile, are the most socially neglected and fragile of our social bonds. Yet love relationships, in a world of endless distractions and stresses are almost equally as fragile. Perhaps the most fragile of all are sexual relationships, which have no sustained emotional connection or bond at all.

Family, too, has been remodeled, to include different permutations. This is a positive development, in my opinion, as it more closely resembles the extended clan, community and kinship of earlier humans where tasks, roles, and identities were more balanced, equal and spread out collectively.³⁰¹ It has been suggested that at earlier times and in different cultures, relations between men and women were more harmonious.³⁰² This would be in societies where private property and industrialization or surplus of materials did not exist. Alternately, the separation of sexes, divisions of labor, may have existed for most of human history.³⁰³ Force, made possible through the differences in physical strength between the sexes, may account for these arrangements coming into effect in the first place; thus a 'sex-class' system, as written about by Firestone, may have preceded economic class systems.³⁰⁴

Men's rights and father's rights groups have sprouted up more recently, to address the inequality of custody being almost automatically and overwhelmingly to the mother in the case of children.³⁰⁵ Caregiving and nurturing duties and obligations in these cases are looked at, and men's involvement in family life, during these court custody mandated arrangements. The content, then, of family, is more important than the form, when it comes to the wellbeing of spouses, and of children. The workplace, and its necessary transformation, is what is overdue, when it comes to support of and encouragement of families and family policies, identities and self-images, and de-gendering of parenting.³⁰⁶ Technological changes and employment type evolution can contribute, either positively, or negatively, to these gender and sex based divisions and inequalities.³⁰⁷ Changes must also be made, therefore, to the social benefits that workers receive, and to the character of work itself.³⁰⁸

Love is a relation to the other.³⁰⁹ It can be seen as a construction where desire turns into a need. The reversion prevents it from being truly transcendent. The borders between the self and the other are no longer so clear. The lover is characterized typically as being male, and the loved as being female. The lover is closer to transcendence, and the loved is in an abyss of animality or maternity.³¹⁰ The lover then eventually turns back to the world and transcendence. The woman is the carnal embodiment of desire.³¹¹ The male achieves transcendence at the expense of the female's desire and subjectivity, and is responsible for others, as a man. This finds resolution in the creation of a child, through paternity, and another, in procreation. The relation between I and the other is not symmetrical, it is compromised by emotional and contingent love.³¹² However, relationships of alterity do not have to interfere with one another, possibly sufficient unto itself as a relationship (at least temporarily and transiently), and the other does not have to collapse into the same.³¹³

²⁹⁸ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 228. "Despite the fact that men report falling out of love more quickly, it's women who initiate the majority of breakups. And women, it seems, also have an easier time accepting their former romantic friends than the men do. After a breakup, men – supposedly the less emotional gender – report more loneliness, depression, and sleeplessness than women do. This is equally true after divorce: Married men live longer and emotionally healthier lives than divorced or single men; unmarried women live longer and are far happier than married women."

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *ibid.* See also Robert Solomon.

³⁰¹ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 125.

³⁰² Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 24.

³⁰³ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 27.

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 150.

³⁰⁶ Kimmel, M. 2004. p. 157. See also, Andrew Greely, Scott Coltrane, Christopher Lasch, and David Demo.

³⁰⁷ Chancer and Watkins. 2006. p. 115.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 204.

³¹⁰ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 215.

³¹¹ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 218.

³¹² Chanter, T. 1995. p. 101.

³¹³ Chanter, T. 1995. p. 213. See also, Emmanuel Levinas.

The increased emphasis on sexual stamina and ability highlights the pressure that men are under to avoid impotence and the severe stigma associated with it.³¹⁴ Sexual virility is a major area of asserting and proving one's masculinity, to oneself and to women. Sexual power and potency is a requirement of the male role. The impotency covers not just an inability for a man's penis to achieve erection, but extends to describe the man overall; a lack of power and agency and failure as a man, is associated with the impotent label. He loses not only his erections, but his penis, and indeed himself as a true man. Connected to this are the increasing emphasis on life-long sexual activity in one's life, and media's constant fascination with sex, and the demanding male (and female) sexual script.

Sexual competence is a central part of contemporary masculinity.³¹⁵ It consolidates and confirms gender. Men with impotence feel that their masculinity *and* sexuality are threatened, or have been vanquished. Male gender leans on sexuality (and the body, as discussed previously), so that the need for convincing and stellar sexual performance is great. The capacity for erection is an important signifier of masculinity and control.³¹⁶ Without it, a man is deemed to be not a man. It is the most important aspect of successful masculinity. Masculine sexuality assumes the ability for potent function. Men believe that they must be ready, willing and eager to get as much sex as they can, that their sexual apparatus is relatively simple and straightforward, unlike women's, other men are having better and more sex than they are, the man must teach and lead his sexual partner to experience pleasure and orgasms, sexual prowess is serious and a task-oriented business, intercourse is "real" sex, sexual prowess is never permanently earned, it must be reproven each time, and so on.³¹⁷ All of these demands require an erection.

Sexuality is isolated as genetically focused and away from other facets of life, learned through masturbation in adolescence and transferred onto interpersonal relationships and situations. The confirmation of virility comes through a proper erection. Difficulty in getting the penis to do this, results in despair and humiliation for the man, immediately in self-esteem and more longitudinally in terms of his masculine reputation, which it is assumed will follow.³¹⁸ The tendency in western cultures for women to increasingly highlight erections, penis size, and partner's prowess, is an added pressure for men, as is the pressure to make and facilitate the woman to orgasm. This can lead to performance anxiety, which exacerbates the impotence situation. The increasing importance of sexuality (for example, as a form of personal fulfillment) in contemporary relationships is also a factor to consider, as is the spectating, voyeurism, and more open nature of pornography, which women are also now viewing and using, which adds to the female gaze and pressure on men to look good and perform well. With the collapse of religion, the family, patriotism, and other social values, sex has been forced to take up the slack.³¹⁹ Sex is a way of connecting with each other, in our increasing isolation, and a way of gauging and ensuring that we are valuable to someone, to be significant to people; in the face of increasing feelings of powerlessness, emptiness, and dependency that is evident in post modernity. Sex can compensate for this narcissistic deprivation.

Professional literature points to both biological/physiological causes and mechanical and chemical remedies for impotence, more so than psychological, these days.³²⁰ Reasons for impotence are seen now to be a combination of both factors, or one or the other. In media, sexuality and sexual function is presented as a life issue, something where a modern approach is taken, along the lines of being rational, orderly, careful, thorough, and up to date with expert opinion. Biomedicine, health and physiology are considered as the appropriate sexual discourse for this. Men have contributed to the growing cases of impotence, by objectifying their penises (along with women objectifying men's penises also), making them central to their definitions of masculinity, and by being as self-contained as possible. Relationships are sought for psychological support and esteem boosting, in place of more traditional tasks such as family rearing, and economic reasons.

Due to men being taught to be unemotional, relationships are successful then if sexual fulfillment is achieved, as is compatibility and companionship.³²¹ Consumption oriented capitalism also increases sexuality's importance, as people feel compelled to want more and better sex, and immediate gratification. Being a sexual robot then, at least in mechanical terms, able to perform wherever and whenever and however a woman desires, is a pervasive pressure and weight on men's shoulders. Increased use of the term impotence, has seen a reveal of medical institution's push for more economic return, as has sex therapists, and various media. Having said that, there are considerable benefits for men with impotence, with the medicalization of sex and the more open ways in which sex is discussed. Still, pride,

³¹⁴ Teifer, L. in Kimmel, M. S. 1987.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*

³¹⁶ *ibid.*

³¹⁷ *ibid.*

³¹⁸ *ibid.*

³¹⁹ *ibid.*

³²⁰ *ibid.*

³²¹ *ibid.*

defensiveness and competitiveness is a drive both in society at large and amongst men, and health authorities declaring what are the norms, that standards are high, and the pressure to meet them is constant. These standards increase all the time, and health science adheres to the masculine script of sexual adequacy and performance, and what it is to be a real man.

The sexual revolution, according to Franklin³²², did not change the sexual script so much. When it did/does, men tend to be afraid of being judged sexually and performatively, by assertive and informed women. The sexual script assigns a dominant role for the man, and a submissive role for the woman. Women are experimenting more³²³, and oftentimes earlier than men; women are initiating one night stands and casual sexual relationships more and more frequently. Men are uncomfortable with this scenario, and this can affect their performance, unless they can reassert themselves in a dominant fashion, even if they themselves are “liberated” or “open-minded” and progressive.³²⁴ Partly, this pressure comes from the male sexuality trait that underlines male dominance and the internalization of an achievement orientation. Franklin writes that these traits come about through the socialization experiences of men, and the development of elements necessary for sexual stimulation such as objectification, fixation and conquest. The achievement orientation that most men in the United States³²⁵ internalize and display in social interaction, which pervades their sexual lives. Due to the sexual freedom of women, men may be having sex more, but they may also be enjoying it less, with the emphasis placed (by both partners) on his performance and the accompanying stress and pressure that results from this. Men’s sexual attraction to females places importance on their virility, their looks and their youth, whereas the same does not hold as much for women’s attraction to men, although this appears to also be changing.

Men’s sexual initiation involves men fixating on women’s external appearance and associating an erection with these visuals, whether imagined or witnessed; these parts of women become linked with experiencing pleasure, and “getting” a woman or having sex with her is like winning a trophy, for the hoops that women make men go through, and also for the bragging rights that come with sharing the knowledge with other men.³²⁶ Feminine traits are seen as rare and valuable qualities, so that beautiful women are considered as assets to a man socially, increasing his respect from other men and his sexual standing and value in women’s eyes, by his claiming of a valuable resource. Physical attractiveness plays an important role in male’s attraction to females.³²⁷ The role that physical attractiveness plays in men’s attraction to women is generally thought of to be stronger than in female’s attraction to males. Interpersonal attraction is said to go through stages, of proximity and observation, evaluation and commonality, and exploration and mutuality.

Men observe each other, their surroundings, and their personal space, in instrumental social situations. This is due to the positive relationship between space and dominance. By taking up space, men have a greater chance of being interpersonally attractive to women, and of being seen as a threat to other men.³²⁸ If a man uses a large amount of space, he has a greater chance of being noticed by others. Men resist other men’s invasions of their personal space. Men are more instrumental during the initial stages of contact, perhaps due to being guarded when around other men, and in their search for viable female mates.

Dominance urges may come into play in interpersonal relationships, when a man is befriending another man, or wishes to date or have sexual relations with a woman.

Persons are attracted to others who can fulfill their needs, their dependencies, and in some respects, are similar to themselves.

Love requires mutuality. Intrinsic attraction between lovers, characterized by exchanges and rewards. Love is mutually reinforced when lovers’ affection and commitment expand at approximately the same pace.³²⁹ It can involve the intertwining of the lives of the people involved, with intense affection, in a deeply interpersonal relationship. It can also be said that love is an exchange relationship. Elements of social exchange can characterize it. Rewards are used to express commitment of both parties, and to promote commitment. In Game, rewards are used for compliant behavior, but Game does not describe or provide many tactics for relationships, either their formation or their continuation.

Giving pleasure to loved ones becomes gratifying, and perpetuated through reward giving. Rewards are expected in a

³²² Franklin, C. W. 1984.

³²³ *ibid.* p. 162.

³²⁴ *ibid.*

³²⁵ *ibid.* p. 163.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

³²⁷ Franklin, C. W. 1984. See also Levinger and Snoek’s (1972) Interpersonal Attraction model, a precursor to Game foundations perhaps.

³²⁸ *ibid.*

³²⁹ *ibid.*

love relationship between a man and a woman. Attraction can grow if behavior that is sought after is exhibited correctly and sufficiently. Studies suggest that women prefer a romantic relationship characterized by male dominance³³⁰, and a partner that is highly masculine. Most masculine males prefer feminine-typed females as dating partners. Rewards of being in a relationship include the reduction of anxiety, stress, loneliness, insecurity, reciprocal liking, need completion, cooperative behavior, and physical comfort.

Sexual pleasure is seen and commonly thought of as being the height and pinnacle of sensations, the ultimate experience that humans can have.³³¹

Bauman writes on the cultural processing of sex. The ultimate sexual experience is forever ahead, waiting to be found and felt. The knowledge of one's own impending death as a human, and the role that sex plays in the continuation of the species, is something of which only human beings have a knowledge and understanding. Culture and society is thus to transcend individual life spans, and instead produce and reproduce humanity itself in biological and experiential ways. On the other side of eroticism, love is the meaning which gives to sex the link to immortality and the graveness and gravity with which it is held in many social strata, particularly those of religious doctrines, overcoming the transience of sexual bodies and the durability of their reproduction. The hope of eternal unconditional affection is embedded within most notions of love, in contrast with the perishable biological body with which humans are endowed and bestowed.

Life projects, movements, works of art, liberation, scientific and technological breakthroughs, can all take the place of the immortality project of having offspring, yet are increasingly being replaced socially with once-off installations, disappearing notes and messages, identities which are meant for immediate appropriation and consumption, and immediate discarding also. These postmodern immortalities are meant for the here and now, and to be enjoyed instantly. Postmodern eroticism can be attached to anything, any number of signifiers, apart from sexual reproduction and love, concerned primarily with aesthetics. Similar to identity, it must be ever flexible in response to the demands of an ever moving and changing world. That which can be thought of as ruled by nature alone, can be morphed and shaped by postmodern culture, not a given, but instead chosen and open to change, which can lead to anxiety and a fear that sensation may have been missed and pleasure not maximized to its full potential.³³² Like so much of postmodernity, ambiguity can be pervasive in this area.

In his discussion on postmodernity and Foucault's 'History of Sexuality', Bauman³³³ mentions that previously, the utilization of sex was in support of a supervisory and power hierarchy, deployed in numerous segments of modern social structure such as modern family structures, which has since transformed into a space where privacy and secrecy (supposedly) is not controlled by others, the disintegration of the nuclear family unit, the removing of the romantic layer from erotic love and distilling it to its sexual essence. Bauman claims that this change attempts to initiate social integration and reproduction, making sex instrumental, in a sensation-gatherer fashion, alongside the privatization and deregulation of control, the organization of space and identity concerns, one duty of which is experience collection. Sexual activity is also a criterion of individual adequacy and bodily fitness.

The commitments and obligations towards a sexual partner, except when considering one's sexual reputation in a social circle, are now minimal or irrelevant; nothing comes from the sexual encounter except the sex itself, and its sensations, partners are almost obliged to part, in postmodernity. Similarly, sex is now divorced or removed from the family, pleasure is to be found and justified³³⁴ in spaces not occupied by the family unit. Such events transpire as a heralded indispensable stage in the consequence and instrumental process of individual emancipation, marketization and privatization. Social engagement occurs today through consuming, and the arousing of desires replaces normative regulation.³³⁵

Bauman boldly states that seduction makes redundant or even invisible the pressures of necessity. With such a structure 'love everlasting', 'happily ever after' and 'til death do us part', lose their meaning and relevance, and can even be dysfunctional and damaging. Human relations are cleansed of any undertones which may synthesize those relations into something more permanent. Sexual undertones are paid attention to in every human interaction or inconsequential encounter – deeper than average interest in a person or every offer of friendship is treated with suspicion, calculation and avoidance. Emotionality, and the wish to enter into or keep human relations, is not valued. Instead, the permanent temporariness of relationships are their most stable feature. They can be cancelled at short notice or without notice.

³³⁰ *ibid.*

³³¹ Bauman, Z. 2001.

³³² *ibid.*

³³³ Bauman, Z. 1997.

³³⁴ *ibid.*

³³⁵ *ibid.*

Foucault³³⁶ writes on love and sex both historically and in postmodernity, how sexuality has evolved and sometimes arbitrarily changed throughout the ages, and with a *doctus* that says we are ruled by culture and not by nature. Vigilance over impulses then seems to be gradually eroding in postmodernity, however. The fidelity of both partners, too, was constructed, and has in recent decades been eroding so that now fidelity is archaic, not expected and an anomaly. What strikes when reading Foucault's interpretation of texts from Roman antiquity is how much of cultural and sexual behavior is indoctrinated, staged and manipulated, so that it becomes accepted by the masses as normative. This can sometimes be in plain contradiction to what may be termed impulsive or natural – such as the belief that virginity was a choice and lifestyle, similar to today's Christian fundamentalists who take pride in their virginity, or proclaim themselves to be born again virgins³³⁷, even within love relations, or the practice that marriage would monopolize sexual pleasure. Indeed, Christianity owes a great deal to these Roman texts.

The sexual act is thus contained within the enclosures of marriage or faithful relationships. Pure enjoyment of oneself in such contexts was prohibited, except in certain circumstances such as war. In some cases, a regulated arrangement of a wife and a mistress was written up, ostensibly to remove overt pleasure from marriage, as it had other duties to fulfil such as procreation, domestication and civilizing of future citizens, and a space in which to “bear one's soul” and have a life companion. Self-respect was conceptualized as denying oneself pleasure, or by confining one's indulgence to marriage or procreation.³³⁸

The investment in the body³³⁹ combined with bio-power, is an indispensable element in the development of capitalism, according to Foucault. He is referring to the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the population and its attendant phenomena to economic processes. This connects sex and the role of ascetic morality, the subjugation of bodies and the control of the masses through the agency of knowledge-power, and given authority by the law and its utilization of death.³⁴⁰ So a technical machinery and mastery of sex is employed, the production of sexuality.

Discourse on sex, and permissiveness, has increased, and with it both a freedom and subversion of manhood. Relations of power in sex, where power can do nothing but say no, and produced absences and gaps, that is, sex is placed in a binary system or permitted and not permitted, boundaries and no boundaries, maintained through the act of discourse, prohibition and censorship realized through uniformity of the apparatus.

Desire is both in relation to, and without relation with power. However, power does not have to be seen or thought of as necessarily institutional or negative.³⁴¹

Bauman³⁴² feels that sex is embedded within consumer culture. It is a consumer transaction or acquisition, complete with risks, returns, investment, pleasure, experiences. No sexual encounter can escape social framing or other aspect of social existence, he says, yet within liquid modernity it is becoming the location of increased uncertainty as it floats without any familiar, procreative, lineage, traditional, or religious ties, signifiers, responsibilities or connotations. These sexual encounters and acts, are episodes, rather than spilling over into the rest of life, these episodes can be contained. Sexual energy itself, is encouraged to be increased, unlimited and unrestrained, being unshackled from the limitations of ‘civilizing’ endeavors, in the sublimation of sexual instincts. Attachments are to be kept as superficial as possible, accordingly, and convenience, rationality, efficiency, maximization and agency are valued as premium traits.³⁴³

³³⁶ Foucault, M. 1984. The History of Sexuality Volume Three: The Care of the Self.

³³⁷ *ibid.* “Marriage, in this rigorous ethics advocated by some, demands a monopoly of pleasure.”

³³⁸ *ibid.* “[...] this added emphasis on sexual austerity in moral reflection takes the form [...] of an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one's acts.”

³³⁹ Foucault, M. 1978. The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.* “[there is the] multiple channeling into the controlled circuits of the economy – on what has been called a hyperrepressive desublimation.”

³⁴¹ *ibid.*

³⁴² Bauman, Z. 2003.

³⁴³ *ibid.* p. 62. “[With regard to contacts taking less time to enter into and break away from] Distance is no obstacle to getting in touch – but getting in touch is no obstacle to staying apart.”

3.11 Constructing Masculinity

Male heterosexual behavior has the tendency to be quite rigid, homogeneous and hegemonic.³⁴⁴ Power, control and dominance seem to be prevalent traits in this behavior. Biology and social construction, both play a part in the development and practice of masculinity. Biological imperatives to reproduce, along with our interactions and inherited cultural assumptions and social environment.³⁴⁵

Genetics and the environment we live in, play a major role in shaping us, as does social learning. Just as with sexualities (plural), there are masculinities. Game and the seduction community, focus on and perform what they see and term as alpha male sexuality and identity, a masculinity that is dominant, focused, strong, powerful, assured, smart, normative, and in control. The aim of seduction (in the context of Game), for heterosexual teleiophilic gynephilic men³⁴⁶, is to get to have sex with, perhaps have a sexual relationship with, and optionally have a romantic and habitual relationship with, beautiful women of their choice. This is the ultimate goal.

It is to be mutually consenting sex and relationship, between an adult man and an adult woman (or those of legal age). This goal is personal, social and political, also natural and psychological.³⁴⁷ In turn, this goal can lead to other behaviors, inequalities and identities (such as various forms of heterosexuality). Sexuality, itself, surrounds us in media and society³⁴⁸ and is believed to be socially constructed and through interactionism. Sexual gender orientation is considered primary in defining one's identity and personality. Male sexual gender orientation is viewed as stable over time and situations³⁴⁹ and does not tend to change over the long-term. The disorder of social life can create inner chaos of inner life or intrapsychic thought³⁵⁰, which can be regulated and normalized through both inner discourse and social discourse. Sexuality, can be an effect of power.

The sex-role paradigm, according to Kimmel³⁵¹, is limited because it rarely develops an approach to the study of masculinity that is both comparative and historical; which are two elements crucial to the sociologist. Kimmel tends to be a male apologist, and kotows to feminist perspectives quite frequently; he relies on gender roles as a constructionist argument for the state of men and their motivations.

There are large numbers of observable differences in male and female patterns of (sexual and otherwise) behavior.³⁵² At a basic level, this can be attributed to biological, physiological, hormonal and physiochemical differences between men and women. Sociocultural organizational elements play a massive role, however, as too does social structure. In order to understand some of the motivations behind Game and the seduction community, it is worth considering about origins and formulations of psychosexual development. I will not be able to delve too much into this in the current work, but I shall consider it briefly.

Scripts versus spontaneity in humans is a constant debate, akin to nature versus nurture and chicken and egg scenarios. Freudian and Kinseyian traditions have the image of the sexual drive as a biological substrate imperative and mandate, this is similar to evolutionary biologists' stance. Libido is thought of as, if not central to the organism, certainly one of its centralities.³⁵³ Elements of the sexual script define the actions that will take place; these elements include location, the actors, and the plots.³⁵⁴ The external and interpersonal elements are mutually shared conventions that allow actors to participate in a complex act which has a mutual dependence, and these combine with the internal, intrapsychic and motivational elements to produce arousal, in encounters that will become sexual.³⁵⁵

Gestures that are mutually accessible, verbal and nonverbal, routinized language, petting and grooming behaviors, and conventional styles showing sexual willingness are all culturally shared, external routines.³⁵⁶ These elements are learned over time, and in stages of development. Meanings of these acts can be different at different times, to one or all of the actors involved. The sexual act can be an expression of anger or love, of power or self-debasement. Behaviourality is

³⁴⁴ Kimmel et al. 2015. Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.* See also, John Gagnon Human Sexualities.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Seto, M. C. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁵⁰ Jackson, S. and Scott, S. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁵¹ Kimmel, M. S. (ed.) 1987

³⁵² Gagnon, J. H. and Simon, W. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁵³ *ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *ibid.* "Scripts are involved in learning the meaning of internal states, organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses, and linking meanings from nonsexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience."

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*

lived through the symbolic, and is highly situational. Meaning is attributed to both the interior and the exterior of the body³⁵⁷, and biological phenomena turn into psychological experiences, dependent on the person and situation. Scripting facilitates internal states and meanings, and also bodily activities that express these states.³⁵⁸ A sequence of events occurs, which itself is scripted and leads to arousal as understood in Western societies (from hugging and kissing, to petting, to digital or oral sex, to coitus – ritual drama, which allows actors to rename themselves or situations and objects for special purpose), with variations in order or timing of these. The result is arousal and sexual activity itself, and orgasm can happen in one or more of the actors. This is considered to be “normal” heterosexual activity.³⁵⁹

Invocation of the erotic is normally needed for sexual arousal. A combination of biological physical events and social psychological factors leads this to happen. There needs to be an understanding by all parties involved that the physical events are sexual, otherwise the appropriate responses and sexual excitement will not adequately occur.³⁶⁰ The social (-psychological) situation must (usually) be defined as sexual or potentially sexual, as must the actors, and the social arrangement. Layered symbolic meanings involving arousal (passion or excitement) in recognizing a sexual possibility, and the way the event is experienced, is, as mentioned, complex. These may be difficult to observe, and may not be shared by (any or all) of the participants, or shared minimally, or organized at different times and in different ways. They may also be complicated scenarios, fantasies that have been rehearsed and experienced enough so that their meanings are clear to participants, and creates the emotions looked for.

Similarly, the same gestures may be interpreted differently, at different times, by different actors, or the same gesture may play a different role or have a different meaning in the organization of the sexual performance, and elements entering the performance may be remote to the erotic or intrinsically erotic. Narratives may be linear or non-linear, surreal, non-narrative, absurd or conventional.³⁶¹

In sexual contexts and situations, metaphor (in the form of gestures, acts, characteristics, objects, or postures) organizes powerfully to myriad meanings. Suggestions of these metaphors alone can yield effects.³⁶² Labels given to these situations, acts, images and so on provide associations which in the moment, before, or afterwards, create and utilize sexual arousal, definition and action, association and connection, memory and moment. Erotic components may be present or not present for sexual activity to follow or not follow, so that psychological domains, like biological domains, do not in and of themselves necessitate or result in acts, they are simultaneously of critical importance and yet insufficient by themselves.³⁶³ Acquiring sexual culture as part of sexual behavior is not well understood presently, we do not know how it is acquired or how it affects our sexual and non-sexual lives. For instance, collective sexual cultures and private sexual cultures are not always connected or comparable; conventional social definitions on stimuli are not always applicable. A continuous sense of self may be separate from, or, increasingly, tied to, a sexual sense of self (in the act(s)). The actors create spaces and meanings which are tied to the act, but which can then be left when entering the broader social space again, or which can be made to perform differently with different connotations, such as sadism, love and affection, passion, and other gestures, which are uncharacteristic, but then explained through the situating. Meanings with regard to images, work, sexual and nonsexual experiences, and their origins, and how their meanings change, have to be further studied.³⁶⁴

When considering Game and the seduction community, one can make the case that studies could consider it as culture, rooted in everyday practices, and examine its intersections with art, commerce, ethics, consumption, entertainment, economics, urban space, sexuality, tourism, class, gender, identity, and so on.

Heterosexuality has been increasingly theorized in the last decade or so.³⁶⁵ The plurality of heterosexualities and the interplay and embeddedness of gender and sexuality in particular has been discussed. Studies have explored boys and masculinities, how they are learned and performed in school environments, how heterosexuality is embedded in how girls and boys define, negotiate and consolidate their gendered selves, and how hegemonic masculine performances are closely linked to dominant notions of heterosexuality and a heteronormative environment.³⁶⁶ Boys are required to prove

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.* “The social meaning given to the physical acts releases biological events.”

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² *ibid.*

³⁶³ *ibid.* “[...] may be [...] difficult to elaborate, as a concern for the erotic – the acquisition of sexual culture – is possibly the least well understood or attended aspect of sexual behavior.”

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Renold, E. 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*

that they are real boys/macho men, in ways that show them to be masculine and heterosexual.³⁶⁷ Boys feel a compulsive or compulsory heterosexuality, and can become subject to a heterosexualized female gaze.³⁶⁸

To be a normal boy, then, involves projecting a coherent abiding heterosexual self, and a heterosexual contract with a “straight mind”. According to Butler³⁶⁹, gender is spoken through a “heterosexual matrix” where the expression of masculinity and femininity is embedded in a presupposed heterosexuality. Everything else is defined through this norm of heterosexuality³⁷⁰ so to be real involves the display of a recognizable heterosexuality, through a matrix which is hegemonic, and stylized repetitive acts, dominant versions of heterosexuality are invested in and reworked by boys and men.³⁷¹ The heterosexualization of boys and the sexual regulation of their bodies occurs through the discursive practices of going out with girls, dumping them, and wanting them/desiring them (girls).

Girls participate in this, in their own management of femininities and in the joining of the male and female cultures. Having a girlfriend, or being able to display prowess in getting, keeping, or interesting girls in you, is a performative signifier of hegemonic masculinity.

Boys show signs of cognitive dissonance, when wanting to be close to girls to prove masculinity, but simultaneously wanting to be away from girls and in opposition, again, to prove and assert heterosexual masculinity.³⁷² This, in terms of identity construction, shows how identities are relational and produced through difference, or “Othering”.

Homosexuality and all things Other are usually associated with the feminine, and differentiated and subordinated to the masculine. Renold³⁷³ has identified in primary school children, “professional boyfriends”, that is, boys who define their masculinities through a hyperheterosexual status, with time, commitment and effort in the subject position of ‘boyfriend’, and standing apart as a reference point for other boys and girls, with their heterosexual couplings and romances.

In this way, they establish themselves as the most romantically desirable, most physically attractive and most popular boys. Renold, through her studies, identifies ‘narcissistic’ hyperheterosexuality (the traditional masculine stud, with a liking of having girlfriends, but disliking of girls for their contaminating femininity, wanting relationships, not relations, lots of effort to appear cool and attractive to opposite sex) – including a heterotextuality of the body, misogyny and patriarchal stance – ‘romantic’ hyperheterosexuality (traditional romantic, heteronormative discourses of love, loyalty and heteronormative futures, yet also sporting the latest fashions and positioning oneself as desirable) – still within a strong and established hegemonic heterosexual masculinity – and ‘platonic’ hypersexuality (where still, only high status boys could be close friends with girls and not be ridiculed, and yet had to ask the girls out, so as to contain the friendship within a heteronormative frame) as modes in the boys that she followed and interviewed.³⁷⁴

Worry about being single, undesirable, being dumped, or the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality were also observed. There were sometimes penalties from other boys, when boys spent too much time with girls, as a type of gatekeeping from access to both heterosexual *and* sporting activities, for example. Yet, there is a pressure to do more than “just talk” with girls without a heterosexual agenda.³⁷⁵ Thus, being a boyfriend, for young boys, is both masculinity denying and confirming, and bolster status and power through heterosexual practices.

Men’s virginity has usually been seen as something neutral or negative.³⁷⁶ It is seen as stigmatic to be a virgin. It follows, then, that the expression of sexual prowess by men is desirable and advantageous. Individuals are to a great degree defined by themselves and others in terms of their sexuality. Transitions from one identity to another are seen as rites of passage or status passages, such as virgin to non-virgin, and can be dependent or independent on either the social identity or personal identity levels.³⁷⁷ Experiencing a rite of passages involves giving up one identity in order to replace it with another identity. How people conduct themselves before and after these transformations depends on their beliefs. So, virginity loss can be seen as a life process, a step on the road of sexual experience, similar to education and work careers, a transition from one (social) status to another. What constitutes virginity (that is commonly understood

³⁶⁷ *ibid.* See also Epstein 2001, Renold 2000 and Skelton 2001.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.* See also Rich 1983, Wittig 1992 and Butler 1990.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*

³⁷¹ *ibid.*

³⁷² *ibid.*

³⁷³ *ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *ibid.* See also Epstein.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.* “[...] most boys resulted to defining their heterosexuality through sex talk, sexual fantasy, misogyny, (hetero)sexual harassment, antigay behaviors, and policing and shaming Other nonhegemonic masculinities.”

³⁷⁶ Carpenter, L. M. 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*. “In modern social life, identity (or self) comprises an ongoing project on which people expend considerable creative effort [...] a bridge linking the individual and society. One can usefully distinguish between *social identity*, the identities people attribute or impute to others, and *personal identity*, the meanings people attribute to their own selves [...] Social and personal identity are not necessarily congruent.”

³⁷⁷ *ibid.* See also, Glaser and Strauss, Turner, van Gennep.

as having experienced vaginal intercourse or not), and virginity loss, has increasingly become a question and matter of the medicalization of sexuality, more physiological and less a moral matter. Also, perspectives (of people) on (virginity and virginity loss) can change over time and in response to new experiences.³⁷⁸

Females can see virginity loss as a gift giving, which can result in a series of gift exchanges, which can potentially strengthen relationships, however, gift givers are subject to the whims of gift receivers, who may not feel compelled to continue, establish or commit to a relationship, or continually give favors back or be reciprocal. Ambiguity within the definitions and interpretations of virginity loss give men and women a degree of flexibility, they can choose which definitions they will use in constructing their sexual identity; nonetheless, these definitions of virginity are patterned by group membership. Diverse definitions give people choice in how they construct their identities and in how they approach and practice sexuality.

Fantasy is linked, although not always directly, with sexual action, according to Kimmel and Plante.³⁷⁹ Fantasies can be viewed as illustrations of socially constructed gender differences, and of intrapsychic sexuality.³⁸⁰ Both sexes imagine sexual scripts, which are culturally articulated, then used to shape appropriate sexual behavior. Fantasies can affect physical reactions and behavior, physiological arousal, cognitive and affective evaluation. Some researchers think that sexual fantasies show a clearer picture of male and female sexual natures than sexual action does.³⁸¹ They are rooted in evolutionary and sex-based strategies.³⁸² Men tend to have more “active” language and roles in fantasies, and women tend to be more “passive”. Women tend to be assigned passive roles in sex by language³⁸³, and are less sexually explicit. This, however, is changing as society becomes ever more open about these topics. Women tend to fantasize about significant others, while men do not, relationally, men tend to fantasize much more about multiple partners, than do women.³⁸⁴ Exposure to new customs and technology have an impact on and change sexual identity, which itself is not necessarily static over time. Life changes such as a breakup can result in resocialization after a period of inactivity on the social scene. Many men turn to the seduction community at this period to help them get their bearings on male/female dynamics.

In most cases, masculine sexual expression makes sexual conquest the primary goal.³⁸⁵ This can make discourse phallogentric. A sexual ideology channels sexual expression, and produces specific meanings associated with sexual behavior and maintains these meanings by keeping them current. Sexuality includes genitality and biology, while also including conscious and unconscious desires or fantasies and activities that create pleasure beyond a basic physiological need.³⁸⁶ This can be formed by an individuals’ life experiences and the social molding that defines sexual expression for him, and finds expression or takes place in sexual relationships that communicate sexual mores that are current in society and that the individual uses to express himself sexually.³⁸⁷ Polymorphous sexuality is directed away from other men, and channeled onto women to form specific tastes and expression. In this way, masculine dominance and control are maintained, and a masculine subjectivity is created. Attractiveness and masculinity is judged by other men, if a man is sleeping with a lot of women, and is admired by other men and desired by women.³⁸⁸ Acceptance and approval of a man’s sexuality can lay in his ability to have sex with new women frequently. A hunting-sacrifice mentality is observed in these men.

In contrast to Sanday’s work on college fraternity brothers who must coerce females, rape or pseudo-rape them/ply them with alcohol, or “work out a yes” – that is, forcing the woman to say yes – in order for the girls to have sex with them, Game seduces women (albeit in a number of different ways) and creates the best possible version of (your)self to present to the woman, using self-improvement literature, seduction, NLP, hypnosis, language, kinesthetics, behavioral and persuasion techniques, so that she will be much more likely to say “yes” and to sleep with the man. Last minute resistance (LMR) in the Game, is seen as an “anti-slut defense”, a token resistance on the part of the female, originating from and intending to protect her reputation socially, and to be more certain about a partner, in the off-chance that she may be impregnated. The seduction community actively encourages a healthy lifestyle in general, and remove alcohol from the equation when discussing the seduction of girls.

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*

³⁷⁹ Kimmel, M. S. and Plante, R. F. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.* “In fantasies, we may see more about gendered conceptualizations of sexuality than if we look at actual sexual content, which often involves culturally expected gendered compromises.”

³⁸¹ *ibid.*

³⁸² *ibid.* See also Ellis and Symons.

³⁸³ *ibid.* See also Frank and Anshen, and Richter.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Sanday, P. R. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.* See also, Mitchell, J. 1982.

³⁸⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

A we/they attitude can arise with men protecting other peers and friends' in the face of women who may be showing resistance – according to Sanday.³⁸⁹ Fraternity members rationalize their desire for casual sex by lending credence to uncontrollable and explosive male sexuality. Male sexuality, in their view, is abusive and demands gratification.³⁹⁰ Men and women are like opposing camps, each wanting something from the other. Men want sex, women want companionship, men fight the war with alcohol and words, writes Sanday.³⁹¹ The performance and display of masculinity, and concern with penis size, hardness, prowess, and masculine expression, shows the male ego needing to be fed, reassured, witnessed and admired. Virility is equated with heterosexuality. Abuse can be seen as a way of breaking down barriers, amongst men, and between men and women.³⁹²

Male dominance can take numerous forms, social, sexual, fraternal, verbal, physical, and so on. Women are to be dominated sexually and socially, Sanday writes. Domination is a male birth right, it is believed, and men want to lead and be successful in all areas of life. Successful women can intimidate many men. In the fraternity houses that comprised Sanday's study, women were placed outside of the male status, made to be less privileged in their role, and to be available for sex, their status is merited according to their sexual interactions with males. Most women's roles have negative tags, for example if they are promiscuous or if they are not having much sex. Girlfriends seem to have a neutral or slightly positive classification. A double standard exists, then, however, men are slowly experiencing a double standard themselves in contemporary society, and is a threat to male privilege and power. Group cohesion and sexual conquest in fraternity houses, are a way to protect the individual and bolster their defenses against perceived threats to their manhood. Considerations of money and status quo trump ethical concerns or morals.³⁹³ The men are reactive towards their sexual desire, having no option but to demand sex with a woman; sexual expression is connected with an individual's sense of engendered subjectivity.³⁹⁴

Most people, men in particular, mention how difficult it is to establish and maintain a relationship.³⁹⁵ Casual relationships, on one or more occasions, or "hooking up", is increasingly seen as a viable option for people, who are studying, overworked, or generally occupied in the 24/7 hyperdriven world that we now find ourselves in. Men do not want to expend too much energy and time on things that will not lead to them achieving their goals, but hooking up is seen as a good middle way to gain the benefits of intimate relationships minus the work and emotions. It is a type of Pareto principle deal, or oftentimes a zero sum game. There is an emphasis on friendships which lessens the primacy of romantic relationships; mate selection can be a form of communication among peers.³⁹⁶ The hook up partners are usually strangers or brief acquaintances. No future commitment is expected. It is no-strings-attached. Hooking up begins with sex, and is a prevalent form now of establishing intimacy, especially in college age males and females.³⁹⁷ Men hope to have lots of hook ups and to be known for it, while women are the opposite, as they fear ostracization and judgment by their peer group. Heterosexuality is seen as being optimal; males are seen to be predatory subjects, and females are seen to be passive objects – which supports and reinforces compulsory heterosexuality. For males, hooking up is a type of homosocial communication.³⁹⁸ It is used to earn status among peers. Females are not authentic or agentic about their bodies, as they prioritize romance and social manipulation of a different sort to males'. This may be historically true, however in post modernity it is not the case primarily any more. Thus gendered arrangements lead to sexual decisions, growing out of the contexts within which actors are situated socially. Males and females show more agency now than ever before³⁹⁹, taking actions in the service of one's goals.

Notions of heterosexuality can impact agency, where sexual agency is defined as a willingness to exert power to influence the outcome of events. Though hookups are seen as being unplanned, and in this way facilitate the façade that sex "just happens", men and women prepare for such encounters meticulously. This is a faked spontaneity. This façade and posturing helps people to maintain an air of invulnerability. The hookup is expected, but the hookup partner is spontaneous usually.

³⁸⁹ *ibid.* "Although they believed that women are mainly responsible for anything that happens to them in fraternity houses, they at least give some small consideration to the responsibility of the brothers."

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*

³⁹¹ *ibid.* "The brothers' concern with sexual potency and social success in the male heterosexual role masks a deep fear, hatred, and fascination with homosexuality."

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *ibid.* "The ideology inscribed in such beliefs legitimates male dominance by assuming that male social and sexual dominance is not only natural but necessary for masculinity."

³⁹⁵ Kalish, R. 2015. in Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society.

³⁹⁶ *ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *ibid.* See also, Tolman et al. 2003.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.* See also Morasch 2003. Also: Powers Albanesi 2010, Allen, Husser, Stone and Jordal 2008, Crawford and Popp 2003, Reid, Elliot and Webber 2001, England et al 2008, Holland et al. 2004.

Traditional heterosexual masculinity notions posit that men should have sex with as many women as possible, and are rewarded for having multiple partners.⁴⁰⁰ Women are still taught to be sexually inexperienced, although, as stated before, much has changed in this regard. Men and women's use of sexual agency is affected by hegemonic masculinity, however I would argue that this is changing, and women are increasingly dictating what it is that men may do sexually and how they may behave. One example of this is in fashion tastes, and also certain etiquettes. Of course, this is not to deny that men's behavior is greatly influenced by peers. In the sense of Game, it allows men to be on a more equal footing with women, at least when it comes to strategies of the mating ritual. As Kalish⁴⁰¹ writes: "The males lounge in comfort of the illusion of alcohol-induced spontaneity; the women are several steps ahead of them." Women can use the façade of the spontaneity of hookups as a way of disguising their agency, to avoid stigmatization of going out deliberately to seek sex, and yet remain sex-positive and enact their sexuality as they choose, while still saying that the sex "just happened". Agency is abdicated, and both sexes "go with the flow" of events that lead up to, and during encounters that lead to sex. Women deny consent to sex if they do not want to have it, but if they do want to have sex, they acquiesce to their partner.⁴⁰²

For men, refusing sex would be seen as nonmasculine, so that they must go along with sex when it is possible. Some men do not advance the sexual scenario at all, leaving it up to the woman, and in so doing progress intimacy up a level, by being nonagentic. This method is carried out by high status males, who are already popular and getting female attention.⁴⁰³

Drinking alcohol gives men "beer goggles", which increases the amount of women that they may find attractive⁴⁰⁴, and so make finding a potential sexual partner easier, while also facilitating the notion of plausible deniability if the woman is not up to his standard, or his peers' standard. Game cuts this out, telling men to not drink, but instead to work on their social skills, to increase their chances with women, and to be able to choose women to whom they are attracted. If men get rejected during an encounter with a woman, while drinking alcohol, they can blame their rejection on being too drunk, therefore alcohol is a way of avoiding responsibility. The same is true in the case of sexual performance.

Hooking up can lead to relationships, and, like cohabiting before marriage, may be a way to ensure compatibility before deciding on pursuing a relationship. Still, hooking up is a lot less stressful, more efficient, and easier than having a romantic relationship.⁴⁰⁵ People increasingly are wary of relationships, of trust and betrayal, and see hookups as an alternative solution. According to Kalish, "There are women who prefer hooking up to relationships."⁴⁰⁶ Women are now more comfortable with their sexuality, and women also hookup to avoid emotional entanglements that would distract them from studies or professional ambitions and aspirations, friendship circles, and erstwhile commitments. They may not want commitment, and may want to instead just hang out and have fun, and they do so in ways that are best for them.⁴⁰⁷ Women still behave as gatekeepers of their sexuality, in many instances.

The disparity and dissonance for men comes from these inverted expectations. Men have been told that they need to be more sensitive and emotional, and yet this is not what attracts high value females, who instead want a more sturdy, masculine and hard energy from men. The questioning of relationship status and boundaries is usually left up to women, who interestingly, by asking the question, let the man decide. The person who is least interested or invested in a relationship, has the most power in the relationship.⁴⁰⁸

This is a principle of Game, where "active disinterest" plays a key role in getting a woman's attention. If the hookup relationship is not to have boundaries, both actors usually do not need to say anything, as this silence and lack of defining is indicative of the openness and lack of boundaries. Athletes and businessmen are perceived to hookup the most, and on college campuses, it is athletes and economics students. There is a self-fulfilling prophecy of a sort in this, so that those who believe it to be true, align themselves with these groups or individuals, in a "form of pluralistic ignorance"⁴⁰⁹, in the process making the popular groups or individuals, more popular. Highly sought after males can "afford" to have this abdicated agency, because their status and social circle will go a long way to doing their work for them, so to speak.

Agentic sexuality is affected still by gender role ideology and conflicting narratives about sexuality that permeate culture.⁴¹⁰ As mentioned before, more women are freer with their sexuality now, and hookup in a transgressive way, to

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.* Also, Kimmel, 2008.

⁴⁰¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰² *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ *ibid.* See also, Lambert et al. 2003.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.* "For a lot of guys, the liquid courage provided by alcohol is the only thing that makes them able to withstand the potential for rejection that any sexual advance entails in the first place." See also, Epstein et al. 2009.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.* See also, Siegel, 2007.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.* See also, Waller 1938, and Eslinger, Clarke and Dynes, 1972.

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.* See also, Tolman et al. 2003, Allen 2003, Paul 2006.

enjoy their own sexuality. For men, this behavior is identified with true masculinity, is a status quo and the norm, that is located within compulsory and institutional heterosexuality and heteronormativity. In cultural terms, the prevalence of this is in flux; at present there seems to be a decline of compulsory heterosexuality⁴¹¹, and a lessening of its relevance as a theory – which needs to be more reflexive, less obscuring, and allowing for and expressing the possibilities of change, and existing forms of variation.

Heterosexuality connects and binds women to men, dictating their wants and roles in a way which makes women's self-fulfillment dependent on men.⁴¹² It is true the other way around, also, but as I have mentioned before, this is rarely discussed in academic circles or theory.

Heterosexual identity development has been studied, though to a large extent couched in political manners and appeasements.⁴¹³ There is no "coming out" occasion for heterosexual people. Heterosexual identities are expected to materialize without much thought or exploration. Sexual orientation is similar to sexual identity; where the former focuses more on biological aspects and attractions, the latter focuses more on emotional and cognitive processes, and understandings of the meaning and significance of their sexual attractions, behaviors and relationships. A sexual orientation label is usually self-ascribed. These three traits do not always sync or correspond perfectly – some people report same sex fantasies which they have never acted on, and others have been heterosexual until they switch primarily to lesbian activity, for example.⁴¹⁴ Some researchers say that desiring can be considered apart from anatomy, from gender, and from biology, in the context of our erotic fates; a type of self-generated project of individuals⁴¹⁵, and historically, socially, organized and subjectively construed, in classes and institutions. Power and production, and the organizing of lust/eros, masculinity and femininity, and human reproduction/procreation, have historically fluctuated at different times in different societies, and according to the political economy. Reference points, categorization and the need and social function for these, and people's interests being served by this, are further areas of research.

Sexual orientation does not shift, but sexual identity and sexual orientation labels can. How individuals develop an understanding of their sexuality is an ongoing topic in research, and a fairly new one. As such, heterosexuality can be labelled as an "invisible identity".⁴¹⁶ It seems to be the case, that most heterosexuals do not question their identity. They take it as natural and as a given, and the process – if there is one – is smooth and sublime.

Questioning of this identity or suggesting nonheterosexuality is frowned upon, and is seen as feminine and displaying homosexuality.⁴¹⁷ Sexual orientation questioning still occurs and is not completely nullified by compulsory heterosexuality or hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexual feminine identity is similar, and is rarely questioned why it promotes women to have a lack of sexual agency, or to feel sexually or socially passive in relation to men. As I argue, I believe this not to be the case so much anymore, but historically it has certainly been, and continues to be among a significant number of women. Prevailing norms of hegemonic femininity might allow for greater flexibility however, with regard to compulsory heterosexuality, and there seems to be a greater fluidity in women's sexual identities, which also report higher rates of same-sex attraction, fantasy and behavior among heterosexual-identified women.⁴¹⁸ For instance, they can engage in same-sex behavior such as kissing while intoxicated, in front of men, or out publicly. Most heterosexuals commit to a heterosexual identity without a conscious exploration of that labelling or exploration of other options, and due to compulsory heterosexuality, they rarely move out of this phase and commitment. They expect their identities to remain the same, and do not question it.⁴¹⁹ This is especially the case in men, as the consequences can be more severe if they deviate. Masculinity and femininity are upheld, in general, as is heterosexuality.

Social situations, media or acquaintances may challenge or make some people question their identity, but that is usually as far as it goes.⁴²⁰ Men can admire or appreciate other men, without being attracted to them, for example. One can think about same sex scenarios, but not elaborate on that, and participants in such thoughts are not required to adopt a sexual minority identity or perspective; it is more socially acceptable than actual testing such thoughts out in practice. Again, women have a more flexible and fluid sexuality, and are more likely to consider and adopt same sex behavior than men; they also have less risk of stigmatization, and less internalized homonegativity. Those men and women who identify as heterosexual, then reify such questions and unexplored sense of identity, and turn more fully towards heterosexuality. As such, the research in this area of heterosexual identity formation has been

⁴¹¹ Seidman, S. 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*. See also Eskridge, 1999, Gamson, 2002, Raeburn, 2004., and Walters 2002.

⁴¹² *ibid.* See also, Bech, 2007.

⁴¹³ Morgan, E. M. 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.* See also, Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2010.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.* See also, Katz, J. N. 1990.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.* See also, Thompson and Morgan, 2008, Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012.

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.* See also, Worthington et al. 2008, Boratav 2006, Morgan 2012.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*

limited, and it is difficult and unwise to generalize the findings. The importance of social context is also to be noted. As a word and concept, a norm and role, heterosexuality came into existence before it was named and thought about.⁴²¹ It is true to a large extent, that the seduction community is an advocate of non-monogamy.

Citing evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology on the one hand, and the need to gain experience in socialization and seduction skills on the other, dating and being sexual with multiple women simultaneously is seen as being healthy, proactive, productive, smart and logical. Consensual non-monogamies became popular in the west in the 1960s and 1970s. Recently, perhaps in part due to the increasingly popularization of Game, and internet and other media, and also feminism, there has been a resurgence of interest in consensual non-monogamy.⁴²² Open or multiple relationships are seen as progressive, realistic in terms of biology and human behavior – considering the rates of divorce, and the ease with which it is possible to cheat in numerous ways in today's technological and media saturated society – and books on polyamory⁴²³, 'how-tos' and self-help books, and journalist stories on this fascinate topic and titillate the public, who want to know more.^{424 425} So too, has research increased on this topic. The rise of interest also coincides with increased autonomy and individuality in western democratic postmodern society, and the questioning of normative societal discourses, more open mindedness, the valuation of demandlessness (in the case of romantic arrangements) and non-possession of others. Law, social housing and family and relationship therapy are starting to include non-monogamy in their legislature and considerations.⁴²⁶ Encouragingly, these changes point to a shifting cultural milieu, although it is still far from mainstream in western ethnocentric societies.

There exists non-monogamies, in the plural, because there is more than one form of monogamy; different permutations and configurations. In the seduction community, polyamory is what is most often discussed and considered. Polyamory is where someone has multiple relationships which are emotionally close and/or sexual in nature.⁴²⁷ Swinging or open relationships involve the couple pursuing sexual (primarily) and emotional (optionally) relationships or one night stands, with other people, either together or separately. Anthropological studies on kinship and monogamous and non-monogamous societies is extensive on these topics, and a good starting point for social scientists.⁴²⁸ Socio-cultural shifts are implicated in the increased interest in consensual non-monogamies, as are criticisms of monogamy and non-consensual non-monogamy. Mononormativity is still a dominant mode of amorous and sexual relationships in western society, and includes dominant assumptions of the normalcy and naturalness of monogamy. The term is similar and analogous to assumptions around heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Game, as a niche set of behaviors and anti-groupthink mentality and action, while it encourages non-monogamy, though, it does not actively disavow monogamy; interestingly, Game does simultaneously presume and underline/strengthen heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Game also encourages the creation of a social circle and friends, to have a type of clan. Political, popular and psychological discourses tend to present monogamous couples as natural and morally correct and the ideal.⁴²⁹ Within mainstream psychology and relationship therapy, there is little to no consideration of there being possible consensual non-monogamy.⁴³⁰ Best-selling relationship books exhibit invariably mononormative views; presenting lifelong monogamy as a natural or normal mode of human relating, and a "happily ever after" that seemingly a majority of people aspire to – a type of "Disney reality" which perpetuates fantasies and narratives of there being "the one" for everybody. There is little to no exploration of alternatives to coupledness or extended clans or kin. Evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists point to the rarity of mammals who pair-bond, or who form lifelong pairs.⁴³¹ Indeed, within human cultures, out of 238 societies, only 43 are primarily monogamous.

Western identities are changing however⁴³², as is the nature of love. Equality, egalitarian relationships, autonomous spaces for partners, less formality in relationships and between adults and children, point to greater democratization and individualization of western society, and an emphasis on achieving one's own goals. In a less stable and secular world, relationships are like religion – places where people find refuge, meaning validation and security. Weddings are an

⁴²¹ *ibid.*

⁴²² Barker, M. and Langdrige, D. 2010, 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

⁴²³ See, Easton and Hardy, 1997, 2009. *The Ethical Slut*

⁴²⁴ See also, Benson, 2008, Matik, 2002, Ravenscroft, 2004, Taormino, 2008.

⁴²⁵ For academic writings, see Duncombe et al. 2004. *The State of Affairs*, and Jamieson, 2004. See also, Pieper and Bauer 2005, and Haritaworn et al., 2006, Cook, 2005, Gardner, 2005, Keener, 2004, Kleese, 2007, Adam, 2004, 2006, de Visser and McDonald, 2007, Sheff, 2005, 2006, Barker and Langdrige, 2010, Haslam, 2009.

⁴²⁶ Barker, M. and Langdrige, D. 2010, 2015. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ *ibid.* See also, Paige and Paige, 1982.

⁴²⁹ *ibid.* See also, Rubin, 1984.

⁴³⁰ *ibid.* See also, Barker 2007, Crowe and Ridley, 2000.

⁴³¹ *ibid.* See also, Barash and Lipton, 2001, and Murdoch (cited in Rubin 2001).

⁴³² *ibid.* See also, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995. *The Normal Chaos of Love*.

industry that seems to be recession-proof.⁴³³ With the emphasis currently on personal growth, relationships come under strain both from the outside and from within; a pressure to remain static *and* to change.

These pressures can lead to disposable relationships and divorces, cheating and non-consensual non-monogamy (up to 60 or 70 percent of infidelity in marriages⁴³⁴), and single-person households; also serial monogamy is on the rise.⁴³⁵ Such phenomena are linked to rates of emotional and mental well-being. Questioning whether there is such a thing as real monogamy, is growing. The difficulty of negotiating monogamous relationships while expressing sexual self-identity and holding onto the religious path of the idea of love as salvation and meaning, in tandem with increasing sexualization, leads to tension, and may explain one reason why the dyad form is at the heart of most forms of consensual non-monogamy.⁴³⁶ The prevalence of cheating is also a motivation for Game, that is, learning Game for some people can boost confidence, give the person a sense of abundance, less dependence, less neediness, and more autonomy; it also means that one can get other women after a breakup, that the man can have that assurance with learned competence in seduction techniques.

Attention and discourse of consensual non-monogamy, especially polyamory, has increased in part due to discourses of sexual identity and identity politics. People are claiming it as an identity label, rather than a practice, and are calling for rights and responsibilities on this basis.⁴³⁷ Related to this is the increasing sexualization of society and the move towards people identifying themselves in terms of their sexuality, as Foucault argues.⁴³⁸ Sex becomes central to the expression of selfhood; a sexual subjectification where people are expected to be sexual experts and have great prowess, be adventurous, yet still have that under a veneer of more traditional social forces such as citizenry and work. Feminists posit that patriarchy, men's privileges and capitalism (women caring for family without being paid) are responsible for monogamy.⁴³⁹

The social construction of jealousy has been theorized by feminists, as being created to maintain women's emotional and financial dependence on men, and monogamous relationships separate women from friendships, networks and communities through which they may engage in political activism and challenge these problematic discourses. This relate to Foucault's theory of self-monitoring and scrutiny of the couple relationship, hindering people from critical engagement with society.⁴⁴⁰ As far as feminist theory recounts, I would contend, however, that monogamy could equally be a feminine/women's prerogative, and privilege women, as child rearing is difficult to do alone, and being with a man for financial/material provision and the protection of family, is beneficial. This theory is espoused in Game also, where women are conceptualized as settling down with beta males, who will raise a family with them, while getting impregnated by, and cheating with, alpha males.

Consensual non-monogamy could be seen as an alternative where people would be less likely to become dependent, isolated and detached from communities.⁴⁴¹ Non-monogamies can be liberating, collaborative and communally oriented, in contrast to the violence, possession and ownership issues that monogamy can have. Domesticity and work ethic associated with coupledness can limit people, and may serve wider power structures. As too, does the nuclear family, which is closely associated with monogamy. Poly-families have arisen, which aim to find new ways of rearing children, and of keeping close ties with partners, and extended family. Consensual non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships, while offering more personal autonomy, empowerment, self-awareness and responsibility, also require mutuality, trust, equality and negotiation.⁴⁴² Swinging is also similar, in these respects, and apolitical, and challenging to notions of love and commitment.

Other research says that "poly" self-help books that endorse individuality and universalism, do so at the expense of critiques of wider social power structures, class, race and ethnicity, and set up new normative regimes, with and/or choices, and similarity and/or differences to monogamy to support citizenship-style claims.⁴⁴³ They also argue that such books put forward the notion of imperialist advancement and superiority in the West, sexually and emotionally. An awareness of self, which the books also call for, fails to appreciate the ways that emotions and desires in power relations

⁴³³ *ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *ibid.* See also, Robinson, 1997, Vangelisti and Gernstenberger, 2004.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *ibid.* See Foucault, 1981. Also, Attwood, 2007, Giddens, 1992, Gill, 2007.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.* See also, Robinson, 1997. Also, Munson and Stelboum, 1999.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.* See also, Rosa 1994, Barker and Ritchie, 2007.

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.* See also, Jackson and Scott, 2004. Also, Kipnis, 2003. *Against Love*. See also, Lehr, 1999.

⁴⁴² *ibid.* See also, Anapol 1997, Easton and Hardy, 2009, de Visser and McDonald, 2007, Mint, 2010, Ritchie and Barker, 2006, Philips 2010, Finn and Malson, 2008.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.* See also, Haritawork et al. 2006, Petrella, 2007, Barker, 2005.

are socially constructed, according to these researchers. Oppressive socialization is not necessarily easily overthrown, once it is understood. The equal application of the polyamory model, is thought to be applicable across the board, all classes, ages, genders, races, cultures and religions, sexes and (dis) abilities. These texts may maintain –as with many feminist texts – rather than deconstruct, mononormativities, and fail to appreciate systemic intersecting oppressions, instead perpetuating essentialist notions of sexuality, and moral superiority.⁴⁴⁴ Polyamorous texts frequently state and point out behaviors that are natural, part of human and animal behavior and can be related to, or complement, much of the seduction communities' beliefs, and texts on Game, which do aim for a more open-minded and egalitarian way of doing things, traceable to a liberal humanist framework, including ethical and open communication, and mutual consideration. Academics are still operating in hierarchies, however, and use exclusionary language, whereas they should use constructive and helpful dialogue, in relation to these activist-writers' texts.

These polyamory texts are commendable for advancing discussion on this topic and opening possibilities for people. Also, we can see that work is done to maintain the primacy of the (consensual non-monogamous) relationship, in terms of safety, security, privacy, time, energy and resources, against perceived dangers from outside. Sex-focused relationships and friendships must also be taken into account, Game does this, whereas polyamorous texts focus on romantic love, and poly-normativity, which is not open and community-like, but reinforces notions of private/public and inside/outside⁴⁴⁵. Consensual non-monogamous texts – apart from texts on Game – do not seem to have reached the public as of yet, and legal care for families or relationships that are consensual non-monogamous ones, do not have societies' widespread approval.

People engaging in open-non-monogamy are sexual citizens, but they do not have any real recognition or rights that are afforded to monogamous couples.⁴⁴⁶ Surely, it must be recognized that there are great complexities in non-monogamous discourse and practice – including multiple understandings and practices – and in the analyses of them, in the conjecture of diverse normative and counter-normative discourse on sex and relationships.⁴⁴⁷ Individuals will employ conflicting discourses at different points as they navigate tensions, and work to accomplish different aims.

Open relationships, whether taking the form of polyamory, swingers, casual relationships, open relationships themselves, or consensual non-monogamous relationships and/or people (involving sexual pursuits with anyone, or a dyadic couple who may engage in sexual pursuits with other singles or couples together or separately, single, or models with primary/secondary models, triads or quads as a main relationship, and others ancillary, V structures where one person is equally involved with two others who are themselves not involved, poly-webs and families, polyfidelity or openness, and so on, complete with different boundaries, rules, agreements and arrangements), are a challenge to, and fly in the face of the hegemonic monogamy of western societies.⁴⁴⁸

Still, monogamy and non-monogamy can be present, even within the same relationship, at the same time, and the distinction is sometimes not even useful, or meaningful.⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, as Willey maintains, they might not be discrete binary systems, but instead systems that are linked intimately, and uses the phrase “non/monogamy” to describe this.⁴⁵⁰ Having said that, these divisions and boundaries coming from a non-monogamy discourse are relevant to all universally, across the spectrum of relationships, flexible boundaries, understanding and empathy, across fluid and ever changing groups, in a constant state of becoming⁴⁵¹, comprising of multiple subjectivities, and different notions, practices and beliefs of love (such as self-love, familiar love, love of friends, community, the planet; dismantling notions of hierarchical romantic love), and of sex.

Biological substrates for (highly) sexual people can also be a cause of non-monogamy, and this factor needs to be taken into more serious consideration in further research, along with social constructionist thinking, to more fully understand these phenomena. The increasing numbers of highly sexual women in western society, including self-confident, safer feeling, demanding and sexually hungry women, also facilitate possibilities other than monogamy.⁴⁵²

Men's experiences as men, and not in some social role, is still a relatively recent phenomenon,⁴⁵³ and interdisciplinary. A man's masculinity is still bound with behaving differently from women. Many men, in the face of the women's movement, changed their behaviors because of a desire to please women. Blakeley⁴⁵⁴ contends that men have not, however, changed for themselves. The women's movement is a set of rules for men, by women, Blakeley says; men do

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.* See also, Noël, 2006, Lin and Klesse, 2006, Rambukkana, 2010, Willey, 2006, 2010, Anapol 1997, Fein and Schneider, 2007, Gray, 2002, Wilkinson, 2010.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.* See also Wilkinson, 2010, Warner, 1999.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.* See also Barker, 2003, 2009, Phelan, 2001, Willey, 2010.

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid.* See also, Klesse, 2006.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.* See also, Adam, 2006, Bonello, 2009, Hickson et al., 1994, McDonald, 2010, Phillips, 2010, Labriola, 2003.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.* See also, Finn 2010, Heckert, 2010, Wilkinson, 2010, Frank and DeLamater 2010, McDonald, 2010, Willey, 2006.

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.* See also Rambukkana, 2010.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.* See also Levitte, 2009, and “relationship anarchy”.

⁴⁵² Blumberg, E. S. 2003, 2010. in *Sexualities: Identities, Behaviors and Society*.

⁴⁵³ Kimmel, M. S. (ed.). 1987. *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*.

⁴⁵⁴ 1982, as cited in Franklin, C. W. 1984.

not resonate internally with women's perspectives, but try to maintain power or a sense of stability personally and societally, and to avoid the risk of losing their manhood.

3.12 The World of the Masculine

Kimmel⁴⁵⁵ identifies three patterns that shape men's conception of their place in the world: self-control, exclusion and escape. For instance, he describes the example of the drive for self-control as a quest for physical perfection. He also comments on the rise of the men's movement and the assertions of reverse discrimination on men, in the process comparing, a little dramatically, unjustly and overblown, the men's rights movement to the white supremacists' movement, especially in terms of rhetoric. This argument tends to become straw-man, in my opinion. The rise of the new man in the 1980s and 1990s, a form of 'wimp' or 'nerd', in touch with his feminine feelings, did little to assuage the loss of sexual attractiveness for such uncertain or easily swayed men. Instead, they were apologists, for their gender and sex, but this did not make them more desirable in women's eyes. Equality does not mean male passivity.⁴⁵⁶ In the definition of manhood, everything, it seems, plays a part. This includes everything a man eats, does, says and touches, wears, thinks, or feels. Some of these things, feminism seems to want to reverse, although others would claim that this is against the law of nature.⁴⁵⁷

Currently, men feel their ability to prove manhood threatened by industrialization, postindustrialization and deindustrialization, immigration and the perception of invasion and terrorism, loss of privilege and rights, and loss of competitive edge. Body building, as written about earlier, is continuously on the rise, as men try to make their bodies into invincible masculine machines. In the new global economy, the rich have become richer, and the poor much more poor, so that men are more pushed down than elevated. There is a new era of social insecurity, led by trends of outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, technology and automation removing men from the workplace, preference of women in customer and service based roles. The erosion of the self-made man and the middle-class, is having weakening effects on men's self-esteem. Men feel as if their place in the world has vanished⁴⁵⁸; they do not feel like real men anymore. The rise in depression, particularly among men, is noteworthy.

A more authentic form of masculinity than what is offered by the majority of consumerism, is something that many men feel a loss of and are on the lookout for: an existence with more integrity.

Feminism has empowered women to look at men's bodies, which, in an idealized form of hairlessness, muscular, tan, perfectly sculpted, appear everywhere and are advertised ubiquitously. Most of these models are well endowed, too, leading many men to doubt the validity and adequacy of their penis size.⁴⁵⁹ Men have followed women to undergoing cosmetic surgery, in an effort to appear strong, healthy, fit, slim, and looking and feeling young. This shows a case of homosociality in men's demonstration of manhood, a performance for the eyes of women and other men. Included in this is the metrosexual, a man who takes care of his appearance and fashion sense, familiar with the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers in their urban area of choice.

The metrosexual is seen by some as a compromise between men and women on masculinity, the metrosexual is fit, yet stylish and more comfortable in expressing emotions.⁴⁶⁰ Critics argue that the metrosexual is just a narcissistic consumer, obedient to the laws of capitalism, this consumerism masks itself as freedom. What it points to, however, is the idea that masculinity can be accessorized.

Celebration in popular culture, of a hypermasculinity, is evinced in hip hop music, which extols the virtues of extreme wealth and power, regaining respect in the eyes of society, and the adoration of women; increasingly, the adulation and establishing of brands and marketing is shown to be noble, smart and the right thing to do for one's advancement and

⁴⁵⁵ Kimmel, M. S. 2006. (Second edition).

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 194. "Some women rejected the wimp as well. [...] A wimp lacks "a sense of purpose," including a sense of sexual purpose, one woman told an inquiring journalist. If a wimp were ever to sweep a woman off her feet, he'd probably help her up and make sure she was unhurt. "I appreciate a man wanting to please and all that," commented another woman, but wimps seemed to take it too far. "There's a lot of plaintive 'what do you like?' and 'what should I do?'" Far less common was a man with a "certain agenda," someone with "a sense of 'I like this and I know you're going to like it too.'" Some women openly regretted their demands that men become more emotionally expressive; it turned out they didn't like what the men wanted to express."

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 198. "...feminism attempted to reverse the law of nature [...] Sexually, for example, feminism demands "the impossible," such as "trying not to feel aggressiveness or dominance toward a woman when making love to her" – a statement with which the most radical feminist would probably agree."

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid.* 2006.

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid.* 2006.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.*

achievement. Such art may be interpreted as an insecure masculinity in an obsessive need of demonstration and asserting itself, according to Kimmel.⁴⁶¹

Kimmel goes on to dismiss the entire academic field of evolutionary psychology (including Richard Dawkins and Donald Symons) as offering a 'pseudo-biological' argument for male dominance, in the process grossly simplifying and misrepresenting the field, as well as, in my opinion, hysterically making protestations and justifications for his own writings and biases.⁴⁶² He dismisses, too, the male reproductive strategy of impregnating as many females as possible, and female's success as coming from enticing a male to provide and protect the vulnerable and dependent child. The theory of men being predisposed towards promiscuity, and females having a general tendency towards monogamy, is both criticized and yet validated by Kimmel's writings: he both says that men are in effect brutes who cheat, and yet say that women should not be constrained by monogamy and men should or could be in the opposite role.

He goes on to say that men 'probably' invented love, and marriage, as a way of ensuring childbirth/fertilization of women, and so it was men who 'invented' monogamy. This leaves much of his writing confusing and unfocused, and unnecessarily apologetic on behalf of men, and critical of them without, in many cases, providing clear argumentation or examples, and transparently and biasedly on the 'side' of women, as it occurs not just here, but in other examples of his writings. He does this to fit a view of the world which he holds, in which love and nurturing is the default for human behavior, a rose-tinted glasses take on reality and nature which, more often than not, is not the case. Life is cruel and hard, more than it is kind and gentle, but Kimmel seems to reject this and force his model of how humans *should* behave, onto humans' natural disposition and biological realities⁴⁶³, including almost completely minimizing the differences – physical, mental, emotional, and situational – between men and women in western democratic postmodernity, in an almost utopic fashion.

Kimmel mentions self-help books such as "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" by John Gray, and Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider's book "The Rules: Time Tested Secrets For Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right", both of which are criticized not only by Kimmel, but by the seduction community, as not offering women solid advice on relationships or dating, being premised on non-practical and incorrect assumptions, ones which do not work or are irrelevant. Kimmel, of course, does not view them from a practical perspective, but rather from his skewed-egalitarian mindset, which seems to aim for equality, but at the expense of realism.⁴⁶⁴ He insinuates, for example, that it is ok in relationships for women to try to change men, to not accept them as they are, and that somehow if a woman accepts a man as he is, that it is insulting to the man.

The testing and proving of masculinity is a homosocial experience, Kimmel asserts, yet leaves out or downplays the fact that now women judge men too, in all regards, such as their physicality, mental ability, earning potential, emotional relatability, and so on.

School shootings are an area he goes on to discuss⁴⁶⁵, with bullying being the major reason why boys opened fire and killed their teachers and classmates in these cases. The boys were called 'fag' and 'queer' by their peers, taking away their masculinity, and taunted for being too skinny or too fat, or not living up to the athletic masculine ideal. The shootings then, can be seen as retaliation for being bullied and picked on, and for reclaiming some sense of masculinity.

Erroneously, Kimmel makes a correlation between boys and young men listening to angry music, playing shooter video games, and watching pornography, as somehow exemplifying the outer behavior of men in contemporary society. Kimmel terms the social world that has developed in recent times for boys and young men, one which is filled with hanging out, partying, sports watching, gambling, video games and so on, as "Guyland".⁴⁶⁶ Kimmel describes the seduction process of gaming or of pick-up as 'hooking up'. He portrays most of the men he interviewed for the book as anxious and uncertain of their place in the world, looking for partners online, or going out every weekend and sleeping around. Kimmel writes that guyland is a liminal undefined time span which starts sometime in adolescence, and can continue for a decade, two, or three, or even more. It is also a place or places where guys gather to be around one another, away from the demands of girls, parents, bosses, teachers, jobs or other adult trappings. Amidst this setting, men struggle to prove that they are real men. This is the most coveted target group for the consumer market.

Being caught up in this male milieu can often mean an abandonment of one's ambitions and drives, and a loss of a sense of purpose. Individuals are not the same as guyland, and do not necessarily conform to the 'guy code'. Each guy makes

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁶² *ibid.* 2006. p. 233.

⁴⁶³ *ibid.* p. 235. "Being an involved father may ensure reproductive success far better than rape."

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 239.

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 245.

⁴⁶⁶ Kimmel, M. 2008. *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*. "...[men] move in a languorous mass, a collection of anomic nomads looking for someplace to go."

his own arrangement with this available options and scripts. They find it hard to confide in others, as to do so may risk the appearance of being weak or 'not having [their] shit together'.⁴⁶⁷

What guys do for fun largely defines what guyland is – the boyhood of drinking, sports, sex and video games. Kimmel criticizes, again, the male bonding that happens, between men in a variety of contexts, without a good reason. It seems that only college graduates or married and devoted young husbands meet his approval.⁴⁶⁸ Guys do not inhabit guyland all the time, they are different when with women, with parents or for instance teachers.

In his discussion, Kimmel idealizes women.⁴⁶⁹ He says that women demand respect and responsibility – but do they? Does he claim to speak for all women? What of the women who only respond sexually or emotionally to men who withhold some affection or who do not treat them like perfect princesses? Kimmel is perpetuating and reinforcing the myth, then, that if guys are nice to girls, the girls will respond in kind. However much it might be wished to be true, this is not the blanket reality that Kimmel purports it to be, and is, in effect, one of the major misconceptions that lead otherwise viable and “worthy” men to be unsuccessful in seducing and courting women, and why and what the seduction community and pick-up artistry has arisen in response to. Similarly, Kimmel laments that girls do not have entry into guyland without being promiscuous, or without dressing as guys or as attractive as possible. This is a gross simplification in my opinion. It undermines, again, men, and also ignores the fact that there is a wide variety of groups and experiences which women have, and to which men are not welcome, privy to, or not valued. Kimmel reveals his lack of impartiality with these examples.

Kimmel argues that despite greater choices in everything now, there is an increase in homosociality, for example a flattening of regional and local differences. I would contend that this is not necessarily a bad thing, or as bad as many make it out to be. However, most media promotes the same look, style, behavior and thinking, so that most men look the same. This results in homogeneity, and conformity, and ostracization for those who do not fit in, so that, despite there being more choice than ever for boys and men to claim as identities (such as skaters, nerds, hippies), the pressure to not choose any of these has also increased, paradoxically.⁴⁷⁰ This homogenization might be what simply works in the majority of cases for individuals to create optimal social standing and the best chances for seduction of females. Or, indeed, it may be a power play by corporations and media in terms of an overall ‘look’ that has to be bought, in order for people to seem ‘normal’ and ‘current’, and could be a form of groupthink.

So it comes to be that other subcultures become counter-cultures, they define themselves in opposition to the ‘dominant Guyland ethos’.⁴⁷¹ Similarly, as the economy has shifted from one of production to one of consumption, many men feel their masculinity less as providers and protectors, and more as ornaments. Men’s entitlement is eroding, and in its place, fear has crept in.

In connection, the rites of passage that serve to prove manhood and initiate boys into becoming men, are fewer and more subjective, yet their manhood is validated by peers who have self-declared their manhood, and usually have not earned it. Psychological interventions will not taper or stem this development, however, as lack of participants does not automatically mean the end of ‘guyland’, Kimmel says. Instead, such actions ignore the social and cultural mechanisms that sustain and allow guyland to persist. Some men feel like they are making up the rules as they go along, others feel as if they are playing by rules that someone else invented. Men are being told that they can have it all, and they want to avoid a mundane, trapped, boring life – the life that is shown in the characters on sitcoms, dull witted and slow husbands, and in advertisements, where women are portrayed as the smart agents, and men are clueless. This plays into the vapid, meaningless, disposable consumer culture that exists currently.

Kimmel laments the trend whereby men are refusing to become ‘solid, responsible’ adults. I feel this is over-reactionary and inflammatory, and needlessly alarmist. If some members of society choose to be unproductive, they quickly see, as a self-correcting societal measure, that others are getting ahead, and if they do not want to be left behind, they too better galvanize themselves into pro-action⁴⁷²; while still trying to hold onto as much of their adolescence as they possibly can.

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.* “They couch their insecurity in bravado...They test themselves in fantasy worlds and in drinking contests, enduring humiliation and pain at the hands of others.”

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.* “ [...] guys [...] have ample opportunities [...] for the intimately crude male bonding that characterizes Guyland’s standard operating procedure.”

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.* p. 13.

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 16 & 17. “The dramatic increase in alternatives is accompanied by an equally dramatic cultural homogenization [...] a single mainstream dominant culture prevailing [...] [this] ensures that parties, and party-goers, all look the same. [...] Nerds, geeks, wonks, and dorm rats learn to keep their heads down and avoid drawing attention to themselves if they want to be left alone and not get bullied, beat up, or worse.”

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁷² *ibid.*

The institutions that once structured boys' socialization, such as school, church and family, are no longer doing this, and so men regroup to accomplish certain identity tasks by themselves, or with the help of others, they can become agents of their own socialization.

Biology is changing, too, as improvements in nutrition, sanitation and healthcare make puberty start earlier for about a year every twenty five years, and so adolescence is happening earlier and earlier⁴⁷³, so too, the brain is stretching adolescence longer and longer. Full physiological maturation does not take place until the late twenties or early thirties now. They keep marriage and career options open until their forties or even later, and see early jobs and relationships as more experiences and gauges for the future, rather than their permanent lot in life. There is no need for a serious relationship, if sex is all that you want. Anxious not to repeat the mistakes of over 60 percent of the married/divorced population, these men can form close friendships with women, but make sure that sex is just in the moment, and not about building anything together. Similarly, these men eschew permanent jobs, as they see the failure of trickle-down economics, the fallacy of a future vision of corporate responsibility, pension funds being raided, and the lack of respect for hard work, in the eyes of wealthy people, the majority of whom have inherited riches.

Young people make the bulk of the service economy, with low-paying, low-prestige and low-dignity jobs, as the wage gap and the class distinction goes ever wider, the erosion of the middle class and the reign of the top one percent of wealthy people.⁴⁷⁴

In the face of such hostility and unevenness, it is no surprise that self-help gurus and seduction masters are seen by some men as their way out of the desert. These men, feel disconnected from society, and have less confidence in social, economic and political institutions. To reach the unattainable levels of masculinity that society demands them to have, feelings of doubt, anxiety and shame present themselves in men's inner and outer lives.⁴⁷⁵ They have entitlement, but no real power.

Being a man seems to embody quite a stable set of monikers and characteristics in men's minds, such as never showing feelings, never giving up, never showing fear, being strong, getting rich, getting even, getting laid, winning, and so on. Kindness or compassion are rarely options. Kimmel writes on masculinity as a homosocial performance, made for and judged by other men. I would, as stated previously, contend that women are increasingly those judges and audience. Men must constantly check the boundaries between masculinity and femininity and make sure that they are on the correct side, in effect, policing themselves constantly over what they talk, how they walk, what they wear, what they do. Additionally, a real man must offer constant proof that he is not gay. This translates into a fear of other men, what other men think of you, as perhaps a failure or a fraud.

Men feel like they would lose their friends, or get beaten up or ostracized, were they to even minutely or momentarily step outside of the imposed and confined box of acceptable masculinity. Guys risk everything if they fail to conform to the policing that other men (and women) impose. There is now a movement called "neomascularity", which is a backlash against 'toxic women' and the imposition of feminist preaching in most mainstream media⁴⁷⁶, and a call to arms for men to be unashamed of their masculinity. It is also true, that across the board, empathy and compassion levels are decreasing in western culture, while narcissism is rampant, and the traits of sociopathy and psychopathy are almost rewarded, as any look at the top CEOs of successful companies will show. In the face of such behavior, such as violence, boys and men learn to be silent, indeed, women are complicit in this also, so that, as Kimmel writes, there is a culture of silence⁴⁷⁷, in case any criticism is launched against their own personhood.

3.13 Liquid Life

Bauman discusses postmodernity as a place of overpopulated cities, urbanization, globalization, fluid identities, 'mixophobia'⁴⁷⁸, where empathy is low, trust levels are low, people are surrounded by strangers for most of their lives,

⁴⁷³ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid.* "The increased instability of their long-term employment prospects, coupled with their sense [of a culture that promises instant gratification] that jobs must be emotionally and financially fulfilling, leads to a volatile career trajectory." "Many young adults feel they are just treading water, waiting for the right job, the right person, the right situation, to reveal itself." "They graduate from college filled with ideas about changing the world, making their contribution, and making lots of money, and they enter a job market at the bottom, where work is utterly unfulfilling, boring and badly paid."

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.* "One must act as if one knows where one is going, even if it isn't true. And it's this posture, and the underlying sense that one is a fraud, that leaves young men most vulnerable to manipulation by the media and by their peers."

⁴⁷⁶ PrisonPlanetLive. 2015. Neomascularity: The Male Backlash Against Toxic Women. (video).

⁴⁷⁷ Kimmel, M. 2008.

⁴⁷⁸ Bauman, Z. 2003.

all very new for the human psyche. There is consequently an attraction towards communities of sameness, so that pain can be avoided, along with participation, and the dangers and challenges of participation. Most men hide behind a screen at home, and try online dating, yet still use the same tactics that Hollywood and conventional mainstream thought has told them, all to little success in meeting the opposite sex.⁴⁷⁹ Life is increasingly ambivalent, a trait further spurred on by ‘mixophilia’, Bauman says, as variety in larger populated areas promises more opportunities. The overwhelming sense of insecurity that people feel in the deregulated, individualized, fluid world of accelerated and diffuse change, lead to mixophobic sentiments. This is a state akin to liminality, that of ‘betwixt and between’, a nowhere state.⁴⁸⁰ Inclusion, if available, is preceded by radical exclusion. There is no direct path from one socially approved state to another. The potential to be a refugee of sorts, within ones place of residence, is therefore high, these people become social zombies, within communities, all of which are, ultimately, imagined.

Bauman’s concept of modern life, is that of ‘liquid life’⁴⁸¹, where it does not keep its shape for long, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty. There is a pressure to keep up with fast-moving events, having relevant possessions, being in the moment, and staying one step ahead. It is a state of new beginnings, fraught with worry over the pain of endings. Still, getting rid of things often takes precedence over acquiring them.

Bauman places liquid life within liquid modernity. Liquid modernity is a society where people’s modes and behaviors change so fast that they do not have the chance to develop and coalesce into habits and routines. Liquid life, then, is the kind of life lived within liquid modernity. They do not keep their shape or stay on course for long. Bauman contends that this state of affairs makes human life inhospitable for humanity.⁴⁸² I would postulate that this is a speeding up of adaptation and therefore people need to adapt and acclimate to a more hectic pace of change. Thus, liquid life is precarious and lived under greatly uncertain conditions. There are constantly new beginnings and endings, with emphasis on minimizing the weight and baggage that one should carry over into the next venture or encounter. Almost everything is disposable.⁴⁸³

People who have the best chance of winning in liquid life and modernity are those who are at the top of the global power pyramid, people who belong to many places at once. They are nomads in location, ideology and method, being tolerant of fragmentation. Looseness of attachment, and broad and narrow focuses, facilitate this. Possession, people and situations slip away quickly, so successful people must be light on their feet, and willing to accept the good and bad that freedom has to offer, often leaving a community of belonging.⁴⁸⁴

Yet, people are haunted by the problem of identity. One must neither hold on too loosely nor too tightly to anything; one must also assemble an identity from available parts, making sure that all parts are always current. In the process, people try to compress eternity so that it can fit entirely into the timespan of an individual life; all satisfaction possible must be experienced. Liquid life is a consuming life. Waste is a by-product. Vigilance is respected, as are determination and resourcefulness, but not loyalty. Liquid life feeds on the dissatisfaction one feels with oneself. The self is perpetually self-reformed and self-critiqued, and subsequently self-invigorated. The world is judged outwardly then, from its primary instrumental value; all else is discarded, or not paid attention. Instant gratification and individual happiness is where people aim. Individuality is asserted in a continuous activity of interaction, with the self and others, and made consumer friendly and branded, a site where freedom and security are precariously balanced. Within liquid life, content in culture is but a glimpse, amidst the marketization of life processes, writes Bauman.⁴⁸⁵ One must keep up, or risk being left behind, perhaps for good; minimizing risk has become a mantra for the majority.

3.14 New Contexts for Writing: Literacy and Multimodality

The fact that the book *The Game* was written and released in the 21st century, cannot be overlooked. Due to the internet, smartphones, apps, and other technology, the way that we interact with text and the meanings and life that it may have, both embedded within the primary text itself, and flowing from the text through discussions online, in forums, journalists’ reviews and interviews, members of the public, and supplementary materials on official websites (www.stylelife.com), have an impact on how the text is received and where it stands. The modes of the media (in this

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid.* p. 111. “The longer people stay in a uniform environment – in the company of others ‘like themselves’ with whom they can ‘socialize’ perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the more they are likely to ‘delearn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and a *modus covivendi*.”

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 129.

⁴⁸¹ Bauman, Z. 2005. *Liquid Life*.

⁴⁸² *ibid.* “In a liquid modern society, individual achievements cannot be solidified into lasting possessions because, in no time, assets turn into liabilities and abilities into disabilities. Conditions of action and strategies designed to respond to them age quickly and become obsolete before the actors have a chance to learn them properly.”

⁴⁸³ *ibid.* “The survival of that society and the well-being of its members hang on the swiftness with which products are consigned to waste and the speed and efficiency of waste removal.”

⁴⁸⁴ *ibid.* “With the right speed, one can consume the whole of eternity inside the continuous present of earthly life.” “Fear adds strength to desire.”

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.* “Risks cannot be avoided, but the dangers seem less threatening once commitment is denied.”

case, I am discussing primarily the book) itself as a book, and the related media surrounding and connected to it, give rise to what Kress terms “multimodalities”, which have specific meanings.⁴⁸⁶

Literacy cannot be viewed in isolation from economic, social, technological and user-related factors.⁴⁸⁷ The image holds dominance now. In the first editions of *The Game*, there are illustrations of the author, depicting various scenarios he describes. In the paperback pocket sized version, these had to be omitted. Still, the move from centuries’ long dominance of the printed page, to images and illustrations, and discourse and extra chapters on Strauss’ official website and forum, shows also a trend from dominance of the book to dominance of the screen.⁴⁸⁸ The motivated multimedia design of this is quite self-evident.

Kress argues that the world told is different to the world shown, and that the future of language as writing will be replaced by language as image, although language as speech will remain a major mode of communication. When members of society wish to rebel, there is fierce resistance by those who presently hold power. Predictions about democratic potentials and effects of new information and communication technologies need to be viewed as occurring during struggles over power which may come to pass.

The organization of writing is governed by the logic of time, whereas the organization of image is governed by the logic of space. In practice, this means that speech or writing is affected and its meaning is derived by what is said first, second, third and so on, while with images, the placement of the elements in a space or representation, such as a stage, canvas, webpage, screen or wall, will have a certain meaning.⁴⁸⁹ These representations and meanings order and shape the world, how we see and interpret it. The order of words of a written piece, must therefore be read in the order in which the author presents them, if one is to understand the meaning intended by the piece. By comparison, images have more of a spatial ordering and can be approached in a different way by the audience. Kress says⁴⁹⁰ that while words are up for grabs when it comes to intended and interpreted meanings, images are not. I disagree, as certainly artists can and do have definite intended meanings for images, but these may not be the only meanings, nor the only interpretations available.

New media makes it easier to use a multiplicity of modes, such as image, moving or still, music, sound, and so on. Such changes issue in new opportunities for voices from the public to be heard, and new notions of interactivity such as interpersonal contact between authors or figures and the public, and the notion of hypertextuality, which has an effect on social power directly. Information can now realize meaning in any mode, whereas before word was tied to medium such as books or paper, for example. The affordances of modes become aligned with representational and communicative need, and the flow of communication is multidirectional. As a result, authorship is no longer rare. Everyone, in a sense, has become a critic, a writer, a news reporter; with Twitter and similar internet online platforms, citizen journalism has arisen, along with a more public form of photojournalism and photography in general. So too, has music making, producing and dissemination been made multitudinously easier with the increased capacity of personal technology. Similarly, texts from authors can be edited and rewritten, in emails, attachments, text editing programs, and, in the example of music, with music programs that allow anyone to reorder, edit and remix songs and music tracks. Negative consequences include the lessening of the authors’ or texts’ authority. Greater democracy brings a levelling of power, so that writing may now be seen to be worth less than previously estimated.⁴⁹¹

Writing is coming to be thought of as an assembling according to designs, fit for present purposes. The organizations of the screen/image are starting to shape the organization of the page – e-books and advertisements for books attest to this, where different facets of media and medium are mixing and converging, leading some to question whether books will exist in 50 years. Digital paper, Kindles and other e-book readers mean that one just has to download a book, rather than physically own or purchase it – much in the same way as music is streamed or downloaded now from the internet, and physical copies of music, or indeed movies, radio and TV programs, are not needed, wanted or necessary any more, except as a kind of nostalgia or status symbol perhaps. Writing is not immune to this, and is being subsumed and subordinated to these new logics and practices.⁴⁹²

Supplementary material can be provided by books and authors, where they can more easily update books that they have published, for example they can add extra chapters online, if the reader has purchased the book and has a keycode

⁴⁸⁶ Kress, G. 2003. *Literacy in the New Media Age*.

⁴⁸⁷ Kress, G. 2003. p. 1.

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid.* “The world represented in speech or in writing [...] [is cast] in an actual or quasi-temporal manner.” “The world represented in image is therefore (re)cast in an actual or quasi-spatial manner.” “‘The world narrated’ is a different world to ‘the world depicted and displayed’.”

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.* “[...] the image itself and its elements are filled with meaning. There is no vagueness, no emptiness here. That which is meant to be represented, is represented. Images are plain full with meaning, whereas words wait to be filled.”

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.* “The ease with which texts can be brought into conjunction, and elements of texts reconstituted as new texts, changes the notion of authorship.”

⁴⁹² *ibid.*

located within the pages of the book which is expressly for unlocking the chapter online; online forums, chat rooms, message boards and bulletin boards also help to keep the printed text alive and relevant to readers, who may form a community and share opinions and information on other related works and issues similar or relevant to the printed text in the book that they purchased. Interviews and videos on the author's website, or their YouTube internet channel, are further ways for the public to get closer to both author and text, as are the author's Twitter page, where fans can contact authors directly, and may even be replied to publically, while also keeping up to date with events and new works which the author may have.

According to Kress⁴⁹³, what we call 'books' are not really books, as they focus more on action, do not have to be read linearly, or even read in the same sense as books pre-1970s. He writes nostalgically and even claims that textbooks now do not contain any real knowledge, compared to those of the past. I strongly disagree with this, as it is much too general and indeed dismissive of all writing, and all writers too. Of course, one should always be skeptical and even critical when reading a text, questioning who wrote it, what its motives are, the context, the message, and similar issues. Also, it is doubtlessly true that some texts do not have to be read in the sequence that they are presented. However, this does not mean that a lot of texts do not have a narrative that will only make sense as the author intended, and in a universal sense, by reading and interpreting it in a linear temporal sequence, from start to finish.

Social, economic, communicational, knowledge and information, and technological change are all affecting writing in postmodernity.⁴⁹⁴ This includes a shift in semiotic power; writing is coming to experience the effects of visualization. The formality of writing has changed in accordance with the deformalizing of much of society, and the easier ways in which to access certain people and authorities. The increased use of the image as a form of communication is one proof of this. Pundits have predicted and even surmised that in the near future, SMS text messaging will have given way to image messaging, and emoji, taken from people's smartphones and webcams, and surpassing text in the messages, so that an image will relate all that needs to be said in the communicative correspondence. This can already be seen in instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Kik, and in social media apps such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Vine. Print media, as has been documented in numerous reports and articles, such as newspapers and magazines, is slowly giving way to digital media accessible on tablets, smartphones, laptops and desktop computers. It is not enough to simply look at texts anymore, now it is necessary to examine them in light of the choice of modes made, and modes not chosen. Strauss' "The Game" book offers an example: there are illustrations and examples of some of the seductive techniques he discusses within the text, and also a stylized illustration of him in a different social scenario before the beginning of each chapter. Also, his stylelife.com website and DVD series on Game are accessories and complementary to the book.

Onscreen writing may appear with the modes of music, of color, of moving image, of speech and of soundtrack. There are now even tactile modes – if one wears pressure sensitive gloves which are connected via Wi-Fi to a computer – and coming soon to the public is VR, or virtual reality headsets, where the user will be immersed in a 3D digital world, moving through it physically and mentally, sometimes with the aid of a suit which is also wired to simulate movement, haptic feedback, and further enhance the immersive experience. Writing is increasingly partial to the overall message delivery and content.

Kress calls for theoretical accounts that tell us how to understand communication in periods of instability, not just those shaped to account for a world of stability.⁴⁹⁵

As in social life, where there is a pressure to find friends and sexual partners, and a great deal of significance attached to it while there is increased isolation and fragmentation in society, fragmentation and distortion can be mirrored in media and writing, where the choices on how to create, present, experience and consume a piece are numerous and oftentimes overwhelming and confusing. Speech recognition software and eye-coordinated operating systems are more so-called disruptive or revolutionary technologies. Change is a fact, humans act and work, yet change is usually not neutral. To communicate is a form of working in meaning making. Writing has lost its privileged position as the sole, deferential and authoritative voice of meaning – music, film and webpages can induce meaning and have it easily emerge. Social distance is lessened in informality, such as when speech-like forms are used in email writing, yet fragmentation, proliferation of choice and the drive to be the best induce loneliness, alienation and anomie. Presence is created through some media such as chat, video chat or email, which is what gives rise to informality, a temporal co-presence is present, so that people are 'not distant', but still, not necessarily close either, as hierarchies in social media and online forums exist as they do in real life – there are still those who are 'rich' and those who are 'poor', either in friends, abilities, access, or other ways.

⁴⁹³ *ibid.* "Who is filling the pages of websites with writing? Is it the young? Or is it those who grew up in the era when writing was clearly the dominant mode?" "The new 'books' are often collections of worksheets; no careful development of complex coherent structures here..."

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.* p. 11.

Practically, what knowledge and resources are needed to be made available to handle publically issues of power, resources, culture, is something that Kress aims to answer in his work; how transparency could lead to wider social change; for instance, he writes that power structures changed at the beginning of the millennium, through the effects of globalization of finance capital and popular culture. Individuals constantly sustain, produce and transform the resources of literacy with the needs, demands and meanings which they live and experience in technological, structural, social and cultural conditions.⁴⁹⁶ The logic of writing, when it is on the screen, is being continually reshaped and remade simultaneously tied increasingly to the logic of the image-space, and the image itself as a full means of representing ideas, information and knowledge. For those who use writing to convey information, they must accept that writing now plays one part in communicational ensembles, with decisions to be made as to which information, which audience, and how: writing, sound, image, combinations of these, and more. This requires new thinking, and different attitudes and dispositions towards text, audience, communication, writing, meaning, knowledge and information, utilizing the numerous modal resources involved in the making of messages, including perhaps production and dissemination skills and practices.

Language is no longer the major means for representation and communication. Writing is becoming more image-like. Multimodality constituted messages comprise more than language and literacy, and need to be examined and understood in a multidisciplinary fashion⁴⁹⁷, especially semiotically. In a labelling sense, communication always happens as text, which is the result of the social semiotic action of representation. Text, then, can be thought of as social action, meaning that it can be an interaction between people, bodily action, writing, sound, image, recorded or performed, able to be experienced again or a one-time event. Genre (including procedure) and discourse follow from this text, and the expression of social relations, and in terms of media, in increasing uses of interactive features and interactivity itself; similarly, the binary nature of information flow and possibilities.

Social actions shape the text that is itself a result of such actions. In media, the possibilities for choice are ever increasing, which makes a good case for focusing on design – which is the dominant consideration and criteria for media now, and, correlationally, hybridization, aesthetics and function.⁴⁹⁸ The question of what writing is, is important due to it reflecting social issues such as who is in control, what is being controlled, and what that control is being used for. New possibilities for arrangements of information, and new grammars of multimodal text are being utilized by students and writers in growing numbers, and this has implications for academia and indeed the written word as it is found in books and other such templates. Each mode is used according to what piece of information it is best equipped to illustrate or communicate, so that there is a specialization process at play, superseding the all-in-one function of the communicational load that writing had previously. The use of the mode depends on the inherent affordances of each mode, with aspects of cultural and social work in it, the cultural aspect being called⁴⁹⁹ ‘functional specialization’. Writing thus becomes more simplified, efficient and focused, while images as usually easily accessible and quickly understood, and perhaps a better communicational route to people, even to a mass audience of science. The reading of such multimodal texts is often not linear, being as there may elements such as music, sound, images, moving images writing and so on, even, in terms of online and console computer games, strategies and interactions with other players, or in the case of online newspapers and magazines, other readers and commentators. Thus, strategies of reading must be employed, along with different grammars for different uses being observed. The organization of visual space is the dominant mode in most cases, so that spatial configurations of various kinds are what the reader is most aware of and focusing their attention.

There are usually rules and conventions even for these new modalities, whereby principles of relevance of the reader are followed to pages or screens which have an open form of organization, which exhibits some of the social forms and orders, requirements, tasks and demands of the present and future era, such as new economic, social, cultural and political events and developments, and information as it is supplied. Writing now is ordered to the logic of the image, whereas before it was the other way around. This trend seems to be prevalent⁵⁰⁰, and images are having an impact on syntax and grammar of language, as it becomes more concise, easier to read and clear, new forms of signs and sign-combinations are created (such as smilies, emoticons and emoji), while simultaneously the multimodal messages are becoming more complex, especially when taking into consideration the ways in which mode effects the shaping of knowledge. One way that cognition is changing in response to these new modes and multimodal forms of

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.* “The free movement of cultural commodities has been as significant in unmaking the formerly relative stabilities and distinctiveness of cultural forms and values as have the effects of economic globalization, even if differently so. Cultural globalization has been the servant of economic globalization...” “Literacy, in all its aspects, is entirely social, cultural and personal.”

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid.* “...knowledge or information has no outward existence other than in such modal fixing. [...] Text is the result of social action, of work: it is work with representational resources which realize social matters.”

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.* “Modality [...] is an issue that is very closely connected to modal choice, to design decisions, to the construction of reading paths.”

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.* “The latent visibility of the graphic medium of writing will become more foregrounded.”

communication, is through gamification, which is a new area being studied in academia at present, focusing on these new possibilities of meaning.

Kress and Van Leeuwen⁵⁰¹ describe reading as an active process, which involves the levels of discourse and design, and leads to a type of ‘inward production’, which is mental work. Interactive technology and computer interfaces make reading and perception more physical, involving physical manipulation of joy sticks, mouse, pressure pens and touch screens, and in the case of 3D simulators such as the Oculus Rift, hands, eyes and sometimes the whole body. Reading text situated within technological spaces, allows readers to edit and change the text itself, adapting them for various purposes.⁵⁰² Kress and Van Leeuwen postulate that meaning does not only reside in discourse and design, but also in production. People’s engagement with the world, along with the resources used in articulating and interpreting meaning formulate semiotic modes and semiotic media⁵⁰³, which results from semiotic/cognitive/affective work.⁵⁰⁴

Media are socially formed. Who controls the aspects of the meanings contained within media, is a pertinent question. Control over meaning is initially held by the author, but, at least in some amount and ways, taken over by the audience, readers and receivers, the consumers of the media. The medium or matter which carries the message, that is, the format within which the text is presented and utilized by the author, adds its own layer of meaning. In other words, the same design with different material production will yield different meanings and responses in readers, and signify different intentions. For example, signs written on wood may not mean the same thing as signs made from LED lights, although the words used may be identical. Similarly, stresses in text can operate separately from, and yet simultaneously with grammar. Meaning can be replaced with economic value or with taste and fashion.

Within multimodality, there is a contemporary shift where common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes.⁵⁰⁵ Due to digitization, different modes have become the same on some levels of representation. Sound, music, visuals, and verbal representations can be operated by the same person using the same interface, to express an idea multimodally.

Framing and phrasing combines and situates elements of visual, physical, semiotic, writing, discontinuities, spaces, audio, and so on.⁵⁰⁶ Meanings are made at every level and mode. Meaning is made and exists, then, in multiple articulations. There are four domains of practice which Kress and Van Leeuwen identify as dominantly making meaning, which they call strata. These are discourse, design, production and distribution.⁵⁰⁷ In terms of books, the author is the person who selects the sentiments that are being expressed, and the words in which they are encoded. Each of the layers are realized, in the text and also in the organization of the social practice of which the text is a part. Interpretation, as a form of communication, occurs only when there has been articulation also.

The division of labor of these different levels is usually not the same, at any one time. It varies, depending on medium, author, mode, content, and a host of other factors. So too, are the levels usually not separate from each other. Experiential meaning potential, the idea that signifiers have meaning potential deriving from what people do when they produce them, and provenance, where signs come from other contexts, are two ways in which Kress and Van Leeuwen write that the social stratification of semiotic production is mirrored by stratification of the semiotic resources.⁵⁰⁸ Most importantly, the take away here is that discourses are articulated in modes other than speech or in writing; such writing can now carry a functional specialization, where language-as-writing is used to describe ‘pedagogically salient’ actions, and events in a narrative form, and image is used to describe the ‘shape’ of phenomena.⁵⁰⁹ Such instances can be found in ‘The Game’, where Strauss has illustrations of some seduction techniques he describes as employing himself, or as having been employed by other pick up artists, in his narrative. Thus, it can be seen that narrative is shaped in specific modes, and it is reshaped when it appears in different modes, such as when a book is available also as an audio book, or a pdf file online, which may have videos or audio files linked to and embedded within it.

Discourse affects choice of design, which in turn affects discourse. This reflects the fragmentation that is seen in society in late modernity, and which is also present in areas of representation, where lines of demarcation are often blurred, or

⁵⁰¹ Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. 2001. Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication.

⁵⁰² *ibid.*

⁵⁰³ Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. 2001. p. 68 & 69.

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid.* “...the integration by an individual of a semiotic element [...] into their already existing – and constantly transformed – systems of classification.”

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ *ibid.*

have gone away. Design, and grammars for design, is a stressed factor in how material is to be organized and articulated, and new practices for which scripts do not exist yet are emerging constantly.

3.15 Social Dynamics

Game gurus and seduction community gurus often talk about social dynamics. What they usually mean is the interaction between people, how allegiances and alliances are formed between groups and individuals, and in particular, how men seduce females.

On the academic level, patterns and dynamics of social change can be observed, historically, and to a certain extent, contemporarily also. Revolutionary acts and evolutionary processes come into play.⁵¹⁰ Dialectics of nation, class, race, party and faction form the human horizon in the short run. Looking towards development, further than dialectics (or non-dialectics) is where a broader picture of human change and behavior. Processes of social movement and movements can be random process, determined mechanical process, teleological process or evolutionary process, according to Boulding. Random elements in systems make it hard to predict what will happen socially, in all of the processes mentioned. If there is an organization to offset random changes, then predicting what will happen becomes more certain. Mutations can occur, which further cloud any possible predictions.

The dynamic course of human sociality has strong random elements within it. The wonder about Game, then, is to have a set of parameters that tend to work a lot of the time, if executed correctly, as there is a vector towards certain kinds of organization and complexity in human behavioral history.⁵¹¹ Boulding adds three more processes to those already mentioned, which are equilibrium, cyclical and cumulative processes, pertaining to consistency in patterns of change, repeated patterns and patterns returning to their previous state. Social organization is defined as a role structure with a communication network uniting the occupants of the roles.⁵¹² Threat systems, exchange systems (positive sum games) and integrative systems seem to, at a basic level, characterize social organization. Status is integral to the determination of what role actors play in these systems. Disposition towards the learning of values is also a determining factor for actors. The accumulation of knowledge; prediction, fulfilment or disappointment of prediction, and image change, as process and effects of knowledge. Random elements are much more important in the social sciences.

Men feel stifled by societal rules, and look elsewhere to feel good about themselves, such as online poker, porn, video games, and drinking.⁵¹³ Guys must remain cool and calm, not too eager for a girl's attention, in control, for the sake of appearances among other guys and to increase his chances with a girl.⁵¹⁴ A way for a man to prove he is a real man, is to score with a girl. This indicates power, attractiveness, virility, and manhood. Knowing that other men judge you on impossible standards, leaves guys feeling insatiable, feeling entitled yet despairing if they do not claim enough women. This self-hatred is tackled head on in the seduction community, by giving some agency back to men in the dating world. In Guyland, as Kimmel terms it, men see a war between the sexes, one which they win by fooling the women by letting them believe you think they are goddesses, and afterwards demeaning them to friends. Game seems to level the playing field, dismantling the unattainability of many women, and bringing them down off pedestals.

Rather than pickup, or dating, Kimmel focuses on the college campus activity of 'hooking up'.⁵¹⁵ This is recreational sex with no commitment, 'no strings attached'. He writes on groups of same sex friends who go out together to meet sexual partners in a setting such as a bar, club or party. These people meet randomly in a bar, drink, and go back to an apartment, where sexual interaction occurs. There is no expectation of a relationship, or even of seeing the other person again. These hookups can change into dating relationships or friends with benefits, but always start out as being casual. Such change requires negotiation that can be delicate and complex. Most contemporary males accept that hooking up is the best and most common arrangement available. Traditional forms of dating have almost disappeared. Relationships are often comprised of only sex. Kimmel again skews reality by saying that guys run this show, and that girls who do not want to act on their sexual desires by joining the party will be at home alone. Invariably, if attractive women want company, there will not be many men who will shun such opportunities. Thus, it is predominantly women who hold the sexual cards, and have social power, whether this is admitted in mainstream media or not.

⁵¹⁰ Boulding, K. E. 1970.

⁵¹¹ *ibid.*

⁵¹² *ibid.*

⁵¹³ Kimmel, M. 2008. "All day long, in every waking sphere of life – at work, in school, at the dinner table – guys feel like they have to be so polite, socially acceptable, respectful, and politically correct. In the fantasy world of Guyland media they can re-create what they feel they've lost in reality – entitlement, control, unchallenged rule, and the untrammelled right to be gross, offensive, and politically incorrect."

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.* "It's the guys who appear the most disinterested who end up being the coolest, the ones that the girls find most attractive." "After all, younger men are not established in their careers, don't feel solidly anchored in their families or their communities, face an uncertain financial future, and daily confront a baffling combination of sexually active yet seemingly unavailable women."

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

The pursuit over conquests often has to do with men proving themselves to other men, yet can also contain an element of ‘revenge’ against women who have thwarted or rejected them, or have dismissed their existence previously. By participating in hookup culture, Kimmel states that men are missing out on deep and meaningful relationships with women, that men are entering adulthood ill prepared, and not knowing anything about romance.⁵¹⁶ This does not take into account that romance is a relatively recent construct, and not suitable for attracting women. Being a nice guy, or a romantic, does not impress women, no matter how much they say it does. What women say and what they mean are different things, and Kimmel fails to take this behavior into his lamentation of men’s behavior. Being nice is a false construct, perpetuated through rom com and sitcom movies, series, novels and songs that women in real life do not respond to. Game and seduction techniques address this, and attempt to correct this, so that men who are not wealthy or traditionally good looking, but who may be good guys and worthy of female attention, can have a chance at attracting women of their choice.

Men believe that they need to have lots of money, have fit bodies, a trendy and cool appearance, be in the correct social circles, dance well, have material assets, have the correct chat up lines and be witty, smart, friendly, courteous and funny, in order to woo an attractive woman. Women, on the other hand, mainly just need to look attractive. However, the seduction community, and indeed Kimmel (though exaggerating slightly), identify that quality women need to be accomplished and ambitious, also, and to be so in a feminine way.⁵¹⁷ Today, dating seems almost irrelevant. Whereas before people dated until they found someone appropriate for themselves, now they have sex with people to discover if there are any compatible people for them. In general, there is no pretense towards future commitments. Kimmel’s take on ‘hooking up’ involves ‘one night stands’, which are hookups that take place once only with someone who may or may not be a stranger, to ‘fuck buddies’, who are acquaintances who meet regularly for sex but otherwise do not associate, to ‘friends with benefits’, friends who are not romantic partners, but include sex among the list of activities which they enjoy together. Still, the term hooking up itself can be vague, and used to different ends by men and women.⁵¹⁸

Men and women often play by the same ‘rules’, but are on opposing teams. Sex is removed from romance and love. Sex is seen as recreational self-expression, and a good form of socializing, pleasure, an activity. Double standards can be observed from both sides. Alcohol is often involved, and there is the appearance of spontaneity. Concerning the latter, again Kimmel sides with women, when stating how much more prepared women must be in these encounters, and over generalizing, simplifying and indeed demonizing men’s behavior in the process.

Men are usually the sexual initiators. Women rarely initiate. Kimmel refers to ‘wing men’ in his description of hookups, which is a term used in Game also.⁵¹⁹ These rituals have loose ‘rules’ and phases associated with them, with the aid of alcohol to mask any insecurities, shyness, insecurity, and to make the potential hookup partner seem more attractive, the more drunk both parties are, playing into plausible deniability also, especially on the part of the women involved, so that they can abdicate responsibility in the hookup having happened, and who can protect their reputations. Similarly, men can blame their failure to get a woman that night, on alcohol,⁵²⁰ as well as the courage gained through imbibition (which in Game is termed Approach Anxiety, and tackled with approaching women as much as possible to rid oneself of this fear). This is different to Game, which is comprised of a skillset which is needed to be learned and perfected – without alcohol usually – and combined with an awareness of the dynamics of social interaction at all times, in order to seduce a genuinely attractive girl.

In post-modernity, people are wary of committed or monogamous relationships. Sunk costs, and what it may detract, rather than provide, are the focus. Marriage as an institution is becoming obsolete and unnecessary, even legally, in

⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *ibid.* “...they *also* have to be sexy, and accomplished, and ambitious, and athletic – and not to show that they are expending any energy at all doing any of it.”

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.* “When a guy says he “hooked up” with someone, he may or may not have had sex with her, but he is certainly hoping that his friends think he has. A woman, on the other hand, is more likely to hope they think she hasn’t.” “... hooking up enhances his reputation whereas it damages hers.”

⁵¹⁹ *ibid.* “Guys have elaborate rituals for what has become known as “the girl hunt”. There are “pregame” rituals, such as drinking before you go out to bars, since consuming alcohol, a requirement, is also expensive on a limited budget, so it’s more cost-effective to begin the buzz before you set out. There are defined roles for the guys looking to hook up, like the “wing man”, the reliable accomplice and confidant. “The wing man is the guy who takes one for the team” [...] “If there are, like, two girls and you’re trying to hook up with one of them, your wing man chats up the other one – even if she’s, like, awful – so you can have a shot at the one you want. Definitely a trooper.”” “It’s better to appear less interested – that way no one will know the extent of your disappointment if your plans don’t come to fruition.”

⁵²⁰ *ibid.* “For a lot of guys, the liquid courage provided by alcohol is the only thing that makes them able to withstand the potential for rejection that any sexual advance entails in the first place.”

most situations. Few people in long term relationships seem to be genuinely happy.⁵²¹ Dating takes too much time, in many people's view, so that it is not worth the productivity time lost. They do not want to place all resources into the one situation or person. People have school, jobs, friends, activities, and do not have time to date. They use hooking up to fulfill sexual and social needs. In a similar sense, serial monogamy is just as draining as dating, and as a committed long term relationship. People are putting fitness, career, friends and education ahead of finding a partner. Emotions, especially romantic notions, are seen as not optimal, not efficient, and not beneficial in this hyper-quantified calculated strategic capitalist culture.⁵²² Men and women feel this way (yet Kimmel again skews the discussion on the demonization of men, and the innocence or lack of involvement of women in this).

Kimmel writes as if it is men only who want to be casual, and women would want more, or if women want more, no man wants to be in a relationship or give them any emotional response. In fact, both sexes now skew more towards being casual. Dating also reduces the chances of other hookups. No one, it seems, wants to be alone. Kimmel says that it is mainly women who want the casual hookups to progress to something more serious, and to want to hold the DTR talk, that is, the 'Define the Relationship' conversation. People, and in Kimmel's view, especially men, try their best to avoid this conversation, and relationships themselves, as it defeats the purposes of hooking up in the first place. Relationships are seen as too much work. Intimacy is seen as being disposable. Sex is removed from emotion. Game is where men, through online forums, can talk about these aspects, but in mainstream culture, apart from traditional models of dating and sex, there is no discussion, except in occasional negative articles bashing pickup artists. Kimmel believes that guys hookup to impress other guys, and not to have sex per se. I would again say that he is simplifying and demonizing men, being presumptuous, and acquiescing to traditionalist romantic sentiments, which have only hurt non-macho/rich/confident men in the long run.⁵²³ Men also hookup for the pleasure that sex provides. The motivations can and often are similar to women's motivations.

Hooking up with a certain girl can prove things to other men, and women. It can be about homosociality, in gaining acceptance in a group of guys. Guys can compete with each other, and attempt to move up in the ranks. Numbers of women, and quality of women that a man has slept with, are the criteria for this evaluation. The insecurity that may be behind such need for validation or recognition, is something that Kimmel points out.⁵²⁴

Men worry that they are not doing it enough, well enough, or that they are not physically enough. They feel as though women have all the power, including the power to say no. Women also have the power to compare men with other men, and women's sexual expectations are increasing tremendously, fueled by feminist media, Photoshop of images of men, and advertising campaigns.

Men are feeling as if they are constantly being measured, and feel a lot of pressure to be amazing in bed, and give women the absolute best sex they have ever had, and ever will have. A man does not feel like a man, if he thinks that everyone around him, except him, is getting laid and having sex.⁵²⁵ Both women and men are pleasure-seeking beings. Consistent with this, is the fact that hooking up is today's courtship culture. People value their autonomy in the west.

3.16 Self-Identity

Giddens writes on modernity as affecting the nature of day-to-day social life, and affecting the most personal aspects of our experiences.⁵²⁶ Modernity must be understood on the institutional level, but modern institutions interlace with individual life and therefore the self. New mechanisms of self-identity are shaped by institutions of modernity, yet the self is individually made also, and contributes to social influences that are global in implications and consequences. Modernity is highly reflexive, and this is evinced in Game companies, self-help manuals and taught courses. Social relations are free from depending on locales, with internet and other technology and media, distances and time is thus

⁵²¹ *ibid.*

⁵²² *ibid.* "A lot of guys get into relationships just so they get steady [sex and pussy]" [...] "But now that it's easy to get sex outside of relationships, guys don't need relationships." "Women also hook up to avoid emotional entanglements that would distract them from their studies, professional ambitions, friendship networks, and other commitments. Or they hook up because they don't think they're ready for a commitment and they just want to hang out and have fun."

⁵²³ *ibid.* "...pleasure barely appears [...] If sex were the goal, a guy would have a much better chance of having more (and better) sex if he had a steady girlfriend. Instead, guys hook up to prove something to other guys."

⁵²⁴ *ibid.* "[hooking up] cannot answer the anxieties that haunt guys when they are alone. Hooking up offers sex without entanglements, but it is attended by so many possibilities for ego devastation, misunderstanding, and crises that it can still become quite entangled."

⁵²⁵ *ibid.* "[...] if so many women are available, sexually promiscuous, and hooking up as randomly as the men are, what's wrong with him if he's the only one who's unsuccessful?"

⁵²⁶ Giddens, A. 1991. Modernity and Self-Identity.

overcome, and enlarges the individual's scope. Doubt is a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world.⁵²⁷

The increasing rejection of marriage as a contract, and more people believing that marriage should be for love, or indeed not getting married at all, is mentioned by Giddens as a "free-floating" ideal-type form, uninfluenced by economic concerns or by contractual features. Children and other concerns are seen as causing drag or inertia in relationships, and elements which may cause possible separation or dissolution of the relationship. Friendships or relationships are instrumental in that contemporary relationships are sought only as far as what they can bring to those who are involved. If things go wrong between the partners, it threatens the relationship. There cannot be a strong sense of apathy with one member, because the other member will be disaffected as a consequence. In this way, interpersonal relationships are unlike social relations dominated by external criteria.⁵²⁸

In relationships, self-identity is negotiated through processes of self-exploration and the development of intimacy with one another, thereby creating shared histories with one another – interpolated within the wider world, as technology and social life are inextricably linked, along with notions of privacy.

Individualism is a compulsion, Beck⁵²⁹ maintains, one where the manufacture, self-design and self-staging of one's biography, commitments and networks undergo change according to one's own preferences and life phases changing. The manufacture of complete but not necessarily true social media profiles online, where one can edit and maintain a certain image of oneself to project to the world, as a type of self-branding, hypermarketed, hypercapitalized and hypercommodified entity, attests to this. However, this takes place under the conditions of the marketplace, rationalization, the labor market, labor and social law, the educational system, and so on. People's biographies and even lives, become increasingly "do-it-yourself", where individualization is in the extreme. Whatever a man thinks or does, was and is, constitutes, in the most basic explanation, the individuality of the individual.⁵³⁰ Diverging options and the compulsion to present oneself in a somewhat cohesive fashion, consolidate this notion.

Giddens and Lash contend that currently, reflexivity has grown in society significantly.⁵³¹ Reflexivity refers to the capacity of an actor to be cognizant of forces of socialization, and alter their (that individual's) place in the social structure. A low level of reflexivity can result in an individual being shaped largely by their environment. A high level of social reflexivity would be defined by an individual shaping their own norms, tastes, politics, desires, and so on. This is similar to autonomy. Reflexivity also refers to circular relationships between cause and effect. A reflexive relationship is bidirectional, with both the cause and the effect affecting one another in a relationship in which neither can be assigned as causes or effects. Reflexivity comes to mean an act of self-reference, where examination or action "bends back on", refers to, and affects the entity instigating the action or examination. Reflexivity can be cognitive or aesthetic at its base level.⁵³² Lash writes that aesthetic reflexivity in everyday life takes place through a mode of mimetic mediation. It can take expressive form in "expressive individualism", in the everyday life of an individual situated in contemporary consumer capitalism. Generally, reflexivity is seen to be cognitive in nature.

Tradition is a medium of identity, writes Giddens, who goes on to say that we are living in a post-traditional society.⁵³³ Identity is the creation of constancy over time, it presumes meaning, yet also a constant process of reevaluation. There is a bringing of the past into conjunction with an anticipated future. The maintaining of an identity, and its connection to wider social identities, is a requisite of ontological security. Tradition composes an "other" or "outsider", those who are not privy to the rituals or behaviors inherent in the tradition, and "insiders" being those who know the cues and rules. Threats to traditions, then, can often mean threats to people's sense of self.

Culture has almost ceased to be viewed in terms of hierarchy, and more along differential lines, so that human needs can be satisfied in different fashions, yet still culture is an order making entity⁵³⁴, just in a varied structuration process in various areas and dimensions of human practice. Those deemed unfit for society, whether they be poor, sick or disabled, are labelled as impotent and of no interest to capital or those who run the economy, and vilified for being a drain on the taxpayers' money. This attests to the development that risks have become privatized. The visibility of those successful

⁵²⁷ *ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *ibid.*

⁵²⁹ Beck, U. 1994. in Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order.

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ Beck, U., Giddens, A. and Lash, S. 1994. Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order.

⁵³² Lash, S. 1994. in Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order.

⁵³³ Giddens, A. 1994.

⁵³⁴ Bauman, Z. 1997.

people in society, via internet and other media, serves to exacerbate the problem, showing the stark contrasts between the haves and have-nots. The ‘problem’ of the poor is recast as a question of law and order⁵³⁵, a drain on “limited resources”, they are not needed as producers and useless as consumers, especially the poor, considered as “flawed consumers”. Elderly people and those close to death are despised also, hidden away in nursing homes, in care facilities, not spoken of by active citizens, chased from memory, as the spectre of death itself is chased away, yet simultaneously displayed as a banal event made possible by excess visibility.

Identity rests in postmodernity on the drifting and floating self.⁵³⁶ Present-day life is noticeably devoid of solidarity. The right way(s) of living are uncertain. The satisfaction of individual needs becomes ever more reliant on the marketplace. Self-image splits into a collection of snapshots: you are defined by your image, whether it be online on Facebook or Instagram, or in the clothes you wear, the way you speak, how you move your body when you walk and eat, and so on. Easy to fit and dismantle pieces of personality are tried, which are instantly available, not earned or hard-won. The act of forgetting is an important asset now, equal almost to the act of remembering. Ever new things and people enter and exit the individual’s life. The individual lives with an almost crippling sense of uncertainty which is self-perpetuating, identity is unsteady, ill-defined, constructed and reconstructed, as is the stranger/other. Identity is drifting, without an anchor, unable to find a space to call one’s own in postmodernity⁵³⁷; there is a lack of solidity and lasting definition. Making an identity is encouraged, whereas keeping an identity for life, one which is solid, is frowned upon, more handicap than asset – which is especially true when the individual does not sufficiently control the circumstances of their own life.

Certainly, this contributes to the state of anxiety felt in postmodern times, felt acutely by those who have been denied resources for identity-building. If one does not reach one’s potential, it is because one did not awaken early enough, or walk fast enough, or think hard enough. This in-between state can be likened to Turner and Van Gennep’s idea of liminality.⁵³⁸

Referring to Lasch, Bauman⁵³⁹ mentions that identity refers to both people and things; both have lost solidity, definiteness and continuity in postmodernity. People and objects have become disposable and almost immediately obsolete. All (self) work may be in vain, as postmodernity hinges on “always keeping the options open”. The game of life and its rules keep changing, so that the smart strategy is to keep each game short, lest a big all-embracing game with major and costly stakes be lost. A series of brief, focused and narrow games is therefore preferable, with lesser stakes at risk. Life is lived one day at a time, emergencies compacted into quick emergencies, and long-term commitments are avoided.

One should not get tied to one place, stuck in one vocation, no matter how enjoyable they may be. One should not swear loyalty to anyone or anything. The future should not be controlled, nor mortgaged, the consequences of each game should not outlive the game itself, and responsibility of any consequences that do are to be renounced.⁵⁴⁰ The past should have no bearing on the present in postmodernity. The present is its own isolated happening and construct. An identity is not to stick too rigidly to the body, it can be bought and modified at any stage, and should be done constantly – durable identities become a liability.

Trust of others and one’s own identities and indeed world phenomena require decision-making that is not foolproof, trust invested in some communities but denied to others may turn out to be misplaced. The problem of identity, then, revolves around how to build one’s identity, with which pieces available, and for how long, until the next iteration – necessitating a loose hold on each instance of identity so that it can be abandoned immediately if needs be. It is all up to the individual, his skillset, power of judgement and wisdom of choice among an almost infinite number of possible forms. These forms could be termed avatars (in the online sense and real world sense) where individuals put on and off

⁵³⁵ *ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

⁵³⁷ *ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *ibid.* p. 78. “How can one invest in a lifelong achievement, if today values are bound to be devalued and inflated tomorrow? How can one groom oneself for life’s vocation, if skills laboriously acquired become liabilities the day after they become assets? When professions and jobs disappear without notice and yesterday’s specialisms are today’s blinkers? [...] all acquired rights are until-further-notice [...] [a] withdrawal-at-will clause is written into every contract of partnership [...] all relationship[s] [are] without strings attached and with no obligations earned, and all love is but ‘confluent’ love, lasting no longer than the satisfaction derived?”

⁵³⁹ *ibid.* “In such a world, identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume.”

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.* “The hub of postmodern life strategy is not making identity stand – but the avoidance of being fixed.”

masks and/or costumes of personhood, caught between exhilarating freedom and terrifying uncertainty. Results nor endings are not guaranteed, and so individuals resent the risk inherent in freedom.⁵⁴¹

In terms of the power that men feel within themselves, when it comes to men and women, men feel that women have power over them in sexual politics. They see having sex with a lot of women, sometimes as a retaliation against this unfairness.⁵⁴² To combat this deficiency in their skill set, in bedding lots of women, or any woman, for men who may still be virgins, learning Game becomes a valuable asset. Men constantly talk of being powerless, when being teased by women, and women's beauty is almost experienced as a loss, pain, and anguish for men, especially if they cannot have sex with that woman.

Kimmel⁵⁴³ talks about men who try to be what they think women want: sensitive, good listeners, empathetic – and who then never get the girl. Instead, they are always in 'the friend zone'. This is an area where Game attracts men, who are frustrated about women's double standards. Women use such sensitive men as confidants, yet still go for the macho, strong, silent men type. In confusion and in an effort to improve themselves, men turn to the seduction community for solutions. Women may feel that they can tame or change unfaithful or more 'asshole' type men, and such men give them a dose of masculinity, adventure and self-assurance that is intoxicating. He is the ying to her yang, providing a much needed masculine polarity to her femininity. Women may also be afraid of commitment, and not want serious relationships, or intimacy.⁵⁴⁴ Women may thrive the rollercoaster drama and tension that accompanies being with these men. Such points seem to be lost on Kimmel, the majority of feminists, or (possibly) naive egalitarians. Again, the seduction community's best teachers know and convey these salient points, which often go against mainstream ideologies and groupthink. The men that attract women the most, are the ones that have the most value, socially, survivally, and reproductively. These men, if the women 'catch' them (a 'Trophy Guy'), are a validation for the woman's worth. It can also be mutual validation. These concepts are demonstrated in successful Game, and described by many evolutionary psychologists and biologists.

3.17 Media

It is difficult to change, and with change there are associated risks. In the case of domination, subordinate classes may be aware of the nature of domination but may be too difficult to oppose, and so will go along with whatever flow of domination there is currently.⁵⁴⁵ Having said this, it can be difficult to ascertain people's beliefs when said beliefs in a given population sample can be extremely difficult to catalog. Humans are risk-averse for historical and rationally argued reasons. There is an adherence to relations of order that are taken as self-evident due to their inseparability of the real world and the thought world. The reproduction of the existing social structure of domination occurs through agents internalizing social structures in the habitus as cognitive structures that operate below the consciousness level.⁵⁴⁶ The perception of the social world and behavior based upon that perception involves a process whereby cognition constructs a reality within the rules of internalized classificatory schema⁵⁴⁷, and an act of misrecognition whereby the classificatory schema is seen as vital and its utilization implies an absolute recognition of the social order, according to Bourdieu. Garnham argues⁵⁴⁸ that the social status quo is maintained through a "generalized bribery" as society's structuring principle. In Bourdieu, Garnham contends, cultural production is reduced to a power struggle, with the result that cultural content disappears. However, aesthetic theories and cultural practices are invariably bound with and determined by struggles over access to scarce material resources and social status.

In terms of journalism, media and writers, the very values of freedom, free press and cultural practices which they mysteriously guard are seldom called into question or examined by the very practices that these media custodians strive to preserve and champion. This calls into question legitimacy, integrity, ethics, credibility and authenticity of media and of media producers and writers. On the other hand, this is not to discredit media's potential for opposition towards

⁵⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁴² Kimmel, M. 2008. "Anger lies just below the surface of a conversation about sexual politics; it is remarkably easy to tap, and to activate into full-scale rage."

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.* "Or perhaps [women are] so focused on their careers they don't have time for such foolishness – or the significant emotional investment they have to expend to sustain a relationship." "They don't want to play house, instead they want to be swept away, to conquer and be conquered, to feel passion. Of course, part of wanting what you can't have is inherent to desire in general – we tend to ascribe value in direct proportion to how hard a thing is to get. The coolest guys, the ones who are sought after by the most women (thus the least likely to choose any single woman since that would reduce their chances of scoring with numbers) are still the ones most women want. Getting the most popular guy is the coup."

⁵⁴⁵ Garnham, N. 1993. in Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives.

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid.*

cultural forms and content, and for being socially progressive and utopian in terms of the potential of cultural practice.⁵⁴⁹ Through such media as the internet, the distribution of cultural practices and competences, and their relation to the reproduction of the structure of social power in the Bourdieu sense, albeit diffused and on a global scale, can be witnessed, especially at the level of cultural consumption – the breaking down of classes, so that we see society slowly becoming just a rich and poor dichotomy, and the gradual (some would say rapid) erosion of the middle class. Modes of appreciation of media do, of course, differ in terms of reception and assimilation. The use value of commodities becomes cultural as basic material needs are satisfied.⁵⁵⁰

The dominant fraction remains in the cultural field to reproduce their capital interests which depend directly on the size of markets for symbolic goods; they have a direct interest in the structure of cultural fields, within the disciplines of capitalist production.

Cultural hierarchies may dissolve with increased media connectiveness, however social hierarchies do not. Changes in the divisions of labor, increased individualization, further fragmenting of the social world – how this autonomous cultural process is linked with capitalist structures of production and is realized in the sphere of production is something that Bourdieu does not adequately discuss, according to Garnham⁵⁵¹, especially the area of cultural commoditization, and the realities of a common culture.

The extent to which cultural values and institutional forms of cultural practice can be considered to have an objective value and progressive political potential, is up for debate, as is the extent of the alliance between economic and cultural capital; the “problems” of marketing and funding. The most readily accessible values endorsed are those of advertising and tabloid media, and “regulated” by commercial competition, the market system and “consumer sovereignty”. Most media aimed at men cater to men’s sexual anxiety. Articles center on how to develop abs of steel, and others about how to drive women wild in bed. One can never be potent enough or enough of a sexual athlete.⁵⁵² To assuage the difficulty of ‘getting laid’, guys turn to either porn, or to pickup. Media tells us that we can have it all, that men can become sex gods, masters of the universe, billionaire celebrities with groupies. If they do not have lives like this, they feel resentful.

3.18 The Social Self

One central question in social psychology is why people associate with others.⁵⁵³ Evolutionary psychologists (and indeed social anthropologists) point to the advantages historically of humans cooperating in order to share and exchange resources. This motivation is found in social exchange theory explanations of ingroup dynamics, these dynamics being explained through understanding the patterns of resource interdependence among groups, motivated by the desire to maximize the attainment of resources, or the desire to develop and maintain a favorable self-image. This self contains a personal self and a social self. People feel motivated to join groups which have a favorable social status, try to enhance the status of the groups to which they belong (ingroup bias) and try to diminish the status of other groups (outgroup derogation)⁵⁵⁴, to improve their status relative to other groups; this in turn enhances people’s positive feelings about the group they are in and about themselves individually. Thus, people can use group memberships to define themselves. Due to social identities being shared among people, a group becomes an important part of an individual. Social identity and self-categorization come into play in this group identification.

Concepts of ‘me’ and ‘us’, and judgements of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are involved in this process. People can simultaneously view themselves as unique individuals and yet also as interchangeable with others.⁵⁵⁵ Immediate social context influences the self-categorization process; we need to understand individual’s evaluations of ‘place’ (that is a social/physical/other signifier/trait or social setting) before we can understand their organization of themselves or their relations to the social world.

Brewer and Pickett⁵⁵⁶ discuss the motivational forces which shape the development of the social self, referencing optimal distinctiveness theory which states that people have conflicting needs for inclusion and differentiation, and the

⁵⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 189. “Advertising becomes the key cultural field where commodity design and markers of cultural distinction form and reform in a constant dialectical interchange driven by the forces of capital circulation and realization.”

⁵⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁵² Kimmel, M. 2008. “The sexual mandate of the Guy Code – have sex with as many women as possible, as frequently as possible, no matter what – is so unattainable that virtually every young man feels at least a little bit inadequate.”

⁵⁵³ Tyler, T. R., Kramer, R. M. and John, O. P. 1999. *The Psychology of the Social Self*.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.* “According to the social identity theory argument, the desire to enhance their social selves motivates people’s attitudes and behaviors in intergroup situations. In other words, people want to maximize the value of the groups to which they belong because that value influences their social selves. The social self, in turn, influences feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.”

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ *ibid.*

social self is based on the relative strength of these needs. These needs are to be similar to others, and to be unique, met through a categorical social self and a unique personal self. Social context can determine the weight that people give to each aspect of the self. The need for positive regard, so that people may feel good about themselves, and the need for coherence, so that the world makes sense to individuals, are further motivations in the development of the social self, which has implicit and explicit factors (according to Pelham and Hetts)⁵⁵⁷; that is unconscious and conscious aspects of the representations of the social self.

When people use social groups to define, understand and evaluate themselves, this reliance on the social group can make the individual vulnerable. Other people can accept, strengthen, reject or weaken people's social identities. So, social trust is involved in people opening up to each other.⁵⁵⁸ Social context plays a role in the individuals' gaining access and acceptance into a social group. Some groups may be hard to gain access to, such as the very wealthy. People may be born into overly advantaged or disadvantaged groups, which have different statuses in the social world⁵⁵⁹, which can affect their self-esteem; this esteem is affected by how people interpret their position and how they construct their self-esteem. Cultural values may also affect people's ways of constructing and maintaining their social selves, as do the status of groups to which individuals belong and people's status within those groups. Groups not only allow individuals to exchange resources with others, but provide them with information with which to construct their social selves, helping to define the dimensions through which people categorize the world and the relation to how people evaluate their positions.

There is not one dominant view of the self. Like current conceptualizations of the self, these views are multifarious, changing and multilayered. For example, self-concept can be a representation of an individual's personal identity, the social self is a reflection and internalization of others' reactions to the public self as presented in social interaction, the self is the unique property of the perceiver, self-concept is a relatively enduring and stable cognitive structure, and so on.⁵⁶⁰

What can be shared publically and understood as such are the outward impressions that the self enacts, the symbolic social meanings which are communicated and projected through role relationships, intergroup relations and social interaction, but not the subjectivity of experience that is denoted by the concept of self. The contents of self-concept can be surmised to come from personal experience, observation and interpretation of past behavior, and a process of self-inference, or, are derived from social interaction and social influence in a social interactionist manner, the social self is a function of how people appear and are reacted to by others.⁵⁶¹ The first premise takes for granted that the individual develops a picture of himself on the basis of his personal experience of his own individual behavior. The second premise supposes that the individual acquires self in the reflected appraisals of others, and that others in the environment are not 'self', but are in effect a mirror for the self, making self-awareness reflexive when internalized. The self is social when projecting public identities in social interaction, enacting social roles and norms, presented to and perceived by others⁵⁶², shaped by their expectations and containing internalized reactions, expectations and judgements of others. The concepts of an underlying self-structure existing apart from or in conjunction with phenomenal and situationally variable self-perceptions is one which causes some academic debate. The discontinuity hypothesis poses that there is a psychological discontinuity between people acting as individual persons and people acting as group members; that is to say that individual and group behaviors are not psychologically equivalent.

The overall motivation, though, is expressed in the need for a positive social identity, and evident through various processes, such as self-categorization – which leads to theories on how the self is not purely personal. Rather, the self varies from personal identity, collective identity and reflects group memberships and collective similarities that can depersonalize self-perception⁵⁶³, linked to this is the notion that personal identity is not social identity, which is a subjective collective identity that includes others defined as ingroup members; these being made in active processes of judgement and inference which is meaningful, constructed from the interaction between motives, expectations,

⁵⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ *ibid.* "...people can easily become too concerned about the risk of negative feedback from others and excessively avoid situations in which they can receive feedback. Through such overly protective actions, people are deprived of the potentially positive effects of receiving favorable social status information from others."

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid.* "How do individuals manage the sense of self when the social world diminishes the self through negative messages about the status of their social groups?"

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁶² *ibid.* "The social identity tradition has now given the self-concept a central theoretical role in current research on intergroup relationships and group processes [...] but, in line with the discontinuity hypothesis, this tradition has owed relatively little to the established literature on the self. Its view of the self has been influenced more by work on categorization processes [...] although it has used some similar notions..."

⁵⁶³ *ibid.*

knowledge and reality, so that people express both individuality and collective identity, both of which are dynamic and context-dependent.

Social places vary in levels of inclusiveness, there are collective places and individual places. The place that a person occupies at any given moment is variable. Meaning and social standing is achieved through ascertaining these places, performing them, having them recognized and in being validated and seen in them⁵⁶⁴, underlining the relational nature of the social self, and geared towards esteem optimization and favorable social standing, cohesion, and resource maximization.

In this chapter, I have discussed theories and theorists most relevant to the topic of research for this dissertation. Due to limitations of time, other theorists and social science approaches were not included, though I have been as comprehensive as possible. In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology used in this dissertation for the analysis of the material.

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.* "Finding one's place in the social world thus appears to be a fundamental precondition of meaningful human existence."

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodology used when analyzing the material for the dissertation. I first discuss methodology itself, followed by a note on qualitative analysis. Then I discuss the primary method in this dissertation, narrative analysis.

For this dissertation, I use narrative analysis, in my evaluation of the material which I have selected to examine, which is in this case, primarily the book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists' by Neil Strauss. The main factors in my choice of narrative analysis as a method are due to the scope of the material, its implications, and the time schedule of this dissertation.

4.1 Notes on Methodology

One feature of academic social science is that it should be, as much as is possible, autonomous from political and practical goals.⁵⁶⁵ Attendant to this, is the aim to generate factual knowledge of general or universal value, removed from evaluative knowledge. Similar to natural science, the aim is to produce findings that are valid in a way which is greater than from other sources. In order to make this possible, it must be assumed that what is to be investigated and how, is determined by academic researchers operating with independence within a self-governing intellectual community.

Threats to this way of operating (and academic freedom itself) include an increasing emphasis on the knowledge economy, on governments, institutions and corporations to extract results from scientific bodies, the rise of professional schools, the valuing of academic 'products' to external users, interests of investors, stakeholders and funding agents in research projects biasing results, all evidence of an evolutionary shift in postmodernity towards knowledge and information production and implementation⁵⁶⁶, something which has been termed 'post-academic science'. The focus on problems to be solved as a major concern now in academia, attests to this shift occurring. Such problems include pressing social and economic needs. Also, there is the commercialization of academia taking place, with private and corporate interests at the heart of researcher's motivations and actions, along with private sources of funding, and indeed dissemination of research findings. Strategic management of systems of every kind within universities, is another such impediment to 'free' research, and presents numerous obstacles. These changes are justified in that they make research more efficient, more effective and in some cases more transparent, in addition to having a political value, and a practical and pragmatic effect on society, sometimes termed 'action research' – driven towards practical values and outcomes, and abhorrent of terms which may imply a stance or genuine meaning of some kind (or indeed values) such as 'truth', 'knowledge' or 'reality'.⁵⁶⁷ Similarly, while one aim of research is to be objective (and rational and logical) any claim as to an author's or author's work holding objectivity is oftentimes avoided, lest they be held accountable for said objectivity.⁵⁶⁸

The field of methodology should be central to academic research. A major responsibility of the social scientist is to sufficiently engage in checking potential sources of error to ensure that all conclusions reach a level of high validity, in the production of knowledge.⁵⁶⁹ This involves all type of judgements inside the process. The task of remaining objective is not straightforward, yet one must make a concerted effort to avoid any systemic bias arising from background commitments and assumptions. Still, it should be recognized that for the most part, that academic knowledge production is a collective process, generated through dialectical processes within research communities, resulting in conclusions as to what is true, false or currently uncertain. Methodology documents how research is done, and is normative in character. Research conclusions should lean towards false negatives, meaning that findings are treated as false even though they are true, rather than the opposite. Knowledge that is produced is primarily to answer questions about a phenomena, rather than constructing an actual picture of a phenomena or representation, and so the enquiry model

⁵⁶⁵ Hammersley, M. 2011. Methodology: Who Needs It?

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.* " ...any claim that objectivity has been approximated, is downplayed for fear that it will be rejected as self-interested rhetoric...That academic research should pursue knowledge for its own sake is also rarely defended because it is likely to be interpreted as implying that such research is worthless." "...it is now required to specify what sort of practical 'impact' [research] is likely to have." "These cultural themes reflect broader institutional changes. One is the growth in technological research funded by companies in a range of fields – notably pharmaceuticals, computing and telecommunications – and the ways in which this model has shaped ideas about research. Other relevant changes are those that have taken place in the orientation of the mass media, and especially the growth of lobbying, public relations agencies, and think tanks of various kinds, many of these claiming the title to research. To a large extent what we have now in many Western societies is a political culture characterized by 'spin', in which the production and presentation of information and misinformation is governed by commercial or political interests of various kinds, sometimes overt but often covert. In such a culture, distrust is endemic, and this is increasingly extended to academic research."

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*

should be in Hammersley's view be supplemented by a hermeneutic or understanding model⁵⁷⁰, as opposed to the discovery or construction models. The objective results arrived at do not need to comply with religious, moral, ethical or political considerations or practical values. They are to be as neutral as possible. However, neutrality itself cannot be defined in an absolute way, as it is relative to a range of alternatives. The field of methodology itself has three broad genres, which are methodology-as-technique (mainly quantitative), methodology-as-philosophy (qualitative approaches), and methodology-as-autobiography (again, qualitative, a type of research biography, more 'realistic' accounts of the research process, descriptive and less normative, more contextual and social – a constructionist point of view); in each genre a particular kind of methodological writing is treated as central based on various assumptions on the nature of social enquiry, what it can produce and the conditions for doing it well. Reflexivity is continually used in thorough research, including self-reflexivity, riffing off 'the personal is political'.

So, we have seen that methodology refers to a discipline concerned with studying the methods employed in carrying out some form of enquiry.⁵⁷¹ This extends to the body of knowledge built up through this methodological work.⁵⁷² In all cases, a significant level of judgement is required when selecting and implementing types of methodologies and the procedures and proceduralism involved.⁵⁷³ Research design should ideally be an iterative process. Due to the fact that methodological writing is to aid the research process, it must be normative in nature. It follows that normative assessment is essential. Advantages and disadvantages of different methods, how they aid the work relevant to practical concerns, and the threats to validity of the work associated with these methods, should be considered and described.⁵⁷⁴ On the topics of knowledge, knowledge production, truth, meaning, objectivity, academic freedom, understanding, reality, change, answers and questions, accountability, doubt and skepticism, fallibility, validity and certainty, ontology and epistemology, hermeneutics, social science, social scientists⁵⁷⁵, social anthropology, social constructivism, politics, philosophy, intellectualism, paradigms, expressivism, transactionalism, discovery, critical rationalism, constructionist (including symbolic interactionism, socio-cultural tradition and phenomenology) and other research models – and research itself – I shall have to pass, as the current work is necessarily limited in size. So, too, I must keep brief any discussion of definitions and meanings of terms.

I move now to discussion of qualitative analyses in general, and narrative analysis. Natural and social sciences are increasingly becoming specialized and fragmented, and no one branch or discipline can lay claim to having all the answers or facets of reality represented.⁵⁷⁶ The buildup of knowledge is a communal effort which is subject to communal standards; knowledge is increasingly becoming utilitarian, practical, pragmatic, technical and instrumental in nature, and in implementation and utilization.

4.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research by the business sector and further contexts including research and service demonstrations by the non-profit sectors. Qualitative researchers are involved in studies of almost any imaginable phenomenon, and their studies often require institutional human subjects' approvals "in the field". Understanding comes from exploring the totality of the situation (for example, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism). Researchers examine texts in order to develop concepts which help to understand social phenomena in natural settings,

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷² *ibid.* "...it is a short step to the use of 'methodologies' to refer to distinct approaches to studying the social world that involve conflicting ideas not just about methods but also about the intended goal and products of research, the ontological and epistemological assumptions involved, how the role of research is defined in relation to other activities, and so on. As a result, 'methodology', when used to refer to an area of study, has now come to include not just discussion of methods but also discussion of the philosophical and political issues that differentiate the many approaches to social research that now exist."

⁵⁷³ *ibid.* "One example of proceduralism – to be found in many general, introductory methods texts – is the reduction of research design to a fixed and standard sequence of steps. This requires the researcher to: turn research questions into specific hypotheses; operationalize the variables making up those hypotheses; establish procedures for the control of both the hypothetical cause and confounding variables; and identify the statistical techniques that will allow the resulting data to test the hypotheses and reach conclusions about their likely validity."

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid.* "Needless to say, the response of individual researchers to recommendations and cautions in the methodological literature must be reflective, rather than a matter of automatic acceptance. Even if these recommendations and cautions are sound in general terms, they will not usually apply straightforwardly to particular studies."

⁵⁷⁵ *ibid.* "Of course, as citizens, policy advisers, professional educators, practitioners of one sort or another, etc., social scientists can perform a wider range of functions than those mentioned above. In doing so, they will inevitably draw upon knowledge and skills that they have developed or acquired as part of their work. And for this reason they have a distinctive and important contribution to make; even though they are by no means the only people whose occupational background facilitates performance of such roles. However, in all circumstances, they should make clear under which auspices they are speaking, and the boundaries around this, including the limits that operate on the authority of research."

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid.* "The goal is to produce a body of general knowledge that is of value in itself, a resource that is available for anyone to use, as contrasted with specific information that is tied to the needs or demands of particular stakeholders." "Real progress in science is impossible without toleration, without feeling sure that we can publicly state our thoughts wherever they may lead us."

with emphasis on meanings, experiences and views of the participants – that is, understanding context, people and interactions.⁵⁷⁷

There is no one way to analyze textual data. The research question is emergent, in general, and the scope is broad, contextual and flexible. The study design emerges as further insights are gained through data collection and analysis. Due to the nature of the data involved in this study, qualitative analysis is the obvious method to use. Qualitative Data Analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy, examining the meaningful and symbolic content of the qualitative data.⁵⁷⁸

Points of focus in analyzing text data include the primary message content, the attitude of the author towards the message, whether the content of the message is meant to represent an individual or group-shared idea(s), the degree to which the speaker is representing actual or hypothetical experience. Qualitative research is based on the premise that understanding human behavior emerges slowly and non-linearly. Analysis is circular and non-linear. The theoretical framework is used for descriptive analysis. Recurrent themes can then be identified, and patterns can be noticed in the data. A search for causality can be undertaken, and a sequence of events built. The data is searched to answer relevant questions.

Analyzing observations can describe what was observed chronologically over time, to tell the story from beginning to end, or describe key events with critical incidents, in their order of importance, describe and analyze various settings, people, processes (such as control, recruitment, decision-making, socialization, communication), whereby issues can be illuminated. Styles, formats and focus include research reports, scientific research articles, field reports, evaluation reports, and so on, with an academic focus, for example, with an analytical approach.⁵⁷⁹

Interpretation involves the act of identifying and explaining the core meaning of the data. Organizing and collecting emerging themes, sub-themes and contradictions help to generate an overall picture of the problematic. These themes are then confronted with a formalized body of knowledge. Description helps to make complicated things come down to their essence, their component parts, thus making them understandable. Explanation, on the other hand, makes complicated things understandable by showing how their component parts fit together according to some rules.⁵⁸⁰ Explanations are always open, depend on certain conditions, and are partial, indeterminate, inconclusive and uncertain, and limited to specific contexts. Qualitative analysis turns data into findings.

4.3 Narrative Analysis

Narrative Analysis uses field texts such as stories, journals, letters, conversations, interviews, and life experience as units of analysis to research and understand the ways that people create meaning in their lives as narratives. The way that I shall employ this technique when analyzing the material that is Strauss' book, is by examining the narrative arc and character journey of the author and viewpoints espoused within.

This type of analysis reformulates stories presented by people in different contexts, and based on their different experiences. Centers on what the author chooses to tell about a given topic, looking at the core plot and basic actions involved therein.⁵⁸¹

There is a distinction between narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Narrative analysis utilizes “narrative reasoning” by shaping data in a narrative form and doing an in-depth analysis of each narrative on its own. Analysis of narratives utilizes paradigmatic reasoning and analyzes themes across data that take the form of narratives.

Narrative inquiry has been used as an analytical tool in the fields of, among others, cognitive science, organizational studies, knowledge theory, sociology and education studies. It focuses on the organization of human knowledge, implying that knowledge itself is valuable, and of note, even if only known by one person. This is based on the idea of knowledge transfer, a theory which seeks to transfer unquantifiable elements of knowledge, including experience. Knowledge, if not communicated, becomes arguably useless, literally unused. Narrative, then, becomes an effective and powerful method of transferring knowledge. This transfer, is bound to cognitive issues of memory, constructed memory, and perceived memory – the narrative form conceptualized as a type of non-neutral rhetorical account that aims at “illocutionary intentions”, in other words, the desire to communicate meaning, infused with the latent meaning intended by the author, where time is found as it was in the past and as being lived in the present, with the re-telling of

⁵⁷⁷ Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. 1994. Qualitative Data Analysis.

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ Daiute, C. and Lightfoot, C. 2004. Narrative Analysis.

the narrative. A narrative method accepts the idea that knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored, and retrieved.⁵⁸²

The methods that can be involved in narrative analysis, are as follows⁵⁸³:

- Develop a research question – the why and how of the research topic
- Select or produce data – information that can be used to produce a narrative
- Organize the data – to hone in on the research question, separate relevant and irrelevant data. This can be termed ‘narrative smoothing’.

For examining a certain event and its effect on individual’s experiences, Labov’s method of Thematic or Synchronic Organization is perhaps the most suitable. It is useful for understanding events in a narrative, and the effects those events have on the individual constructing the narrative. The approach utilizes an evaluation model, which organizes data into the abstract (what it is about), an orientation (who, what, where, when), a complication (then what happened), an evaluation (so what), a result (what finally happened), and a coda (the finished narrative). Multiple or reoccurring elements may exist within a single narrative.

A supplementary approach might include Polkinghorne’s Chronological Organization or Diachronic Organization, related to the sociology of stories approach. This focuses on contexts in which narratives are constructed, the “embodied nature” of the person telling the narrative, the context from which the narrative is created, relationships between the narrative teller and others within the narrative, historical continuity, and the chronological organization of events.

- Interpret the data – some paradigms and theories can be used to interpret data, such as positivist/postpositivist, constructivist, feminist, ethnic, Marxist, cultural studies, and so on.

For this dissertation, due to circumstances, I use a multiperspectival view, based on the theories and research of Chapter Three. While interpreting qualitative data, researchers suggest looking for patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities.

With these approaches, the researcher should draw upon their own knowledge and the research to label the narrative. Narrative forms are produced by constructing a coherent story from the data and looking at the data from the perspective of one’s research question. In the case of ‘The Game’ the author presents a ‘rational tale’.⁵⁸⁴ Rational tales are where the author represents himself or herself as a rational decision maker navigating through the events of the story.

This is a form of interpretative research, seeking to better understand human action.

In this chapter, I have discussed methodology, qualitative analysis, and outlined the method that I will use to analyze the material for this dissertation.

The following chapter concerns the material to be analyzed in this dissertation.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*

5. The Material

This chapter discusses the material that I will use for analysis in this dissertation.

The material for this dissertation is the book by award-winning journalist and critic Neil Strauss, 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists'.⁵⁸⁵ In this chapter, I shall describe the book, its attributes, and format. I also include, for the sake of clarity and context, a brief overview of Game as a concept, and a brief history of Game, and the seduction community.

The book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists' reveals solutions to courting practices that are considered as obsolete by those people who think outside of the mainstream narrative, by examining the underground society of gurus and their students, dedicated to getting better at socializing, meeting women, and becoming more successful. Due to time and space constraints, I shall not look at any subsequent, related or auxiliary material that Strauss has produced, such as his personal website, his email list, his DVDs and videos, his Stylelife seduction company, his online forum, interviews, his how-to book, 'The Rules of the Game', and so on.

Within the story, and the community itself, are formerly frustrated men who, after learning about pickup, become more confident, with increased erotic and social capital. These men can choose to make themselves and their future romantic partners happy.⁵⁸⁶ Many students stay on to teach others. Cultures seek to reproduce themselves, and by discovering the covert and untold ways of how to do this, how to get 'good with girls', Strauss has a powerful tome.

It has themes very prevalent in postmodern society: optimization of the individual, archivation, documenting, collecting, preserving, recording and presenting the individual (when considering Facebook, Instagram and related media) as a brand, or as a person of importance now or in the future, capturing and documenting every utterance, thought, t-shirt worn, and so on.

Strauss begins researching pickup artistry not only out of journalistic interest, but personal need, and becomes, after a while under the teachings of Erik James Horvat-Markovic, a renowned master pickup artist, 'Style'. Strauss starts by describing how he is not good-looking, rich or famous. Instead he is an average-looking man living in Los Angeles who feels intimidated by women, and inadequate in comparison with men who are successful with the opposite sex. His inadequacy inhibits his personal evolution, yet he is not able to learn from the 'naturals' that he observes. So he accepts his difficulties at socializing with women, and thinks that 'some men have it, some men don't'. Strauss' following story is easy to relate to, evoking empathy through honest depictions of a self-conscious but determined man half-skeptically taking a chance to improve himself. The book is cited by many following pickup artists to have been their introduction to the seduction community.

Although not the first book on dating, or even pickup (yet still the first expose on this new community that had originated in the early 2000s), 'The Game' is considered as many people's first insight to the community, or an awareness of it. Though not a self-help or how-to book, it does illustrate many of the techniques of Game and the logic that underpins them. 'The Game' is not a PUA book; it is an ethnography of the PUA community. Interspersing his often autobiographical tale, are snippets and cuts from posts and chats in online seduction forums, a few illustrations and diagrams of seduction techniques, various fonts and graphical typefaces.

5.1 Brief Overview of Game as a Concept

The Game, as conceptualized by Mystery in his Mystery Method, devises the seduction process as linear.⁵⁸⁷ This is the 'Three M Model' comprised of nine stages, from meeting a woman, to sexual intercourse. This can also be termed 'Outer Game', or 'structured Game'. Ultimately, and where this method can be criticized and sometimes falls short, is that the self-improvement in image, and conduct should be internalized to be more authentic, successful and effective. The Mystery Method usually only focusses on appropriating the outer behaviors of 'naturals', instead of working on esteem issues that the student of pickup may have. Following a successful 'gambit' or a 'hooked set' (the 'target' or groups of women whom the aspiring PUA is interested in, shows interest back, and are being more complicit), the PUA is said to have been successful, though more so if it leads to a 'close' or an 'f-close', that is, sexual intercourse with a woman. Overall, the desired effect is consensual attraction with a woman.

⁵⁸⁵ Strauss, N. 2005. The Game: Penetration the Secret Society of Pickup Artists.

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.* pp. 168, 169, 430 – 432.

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 20. "The basic format is FMAC – find, meet, attract, close."

One of the most important aspects of this model is the ‘DHV’, or Display of Higher Value. This is a story or action, hinted at subtly and usually not directly, used to increase the perceived value of a PUA, which increases attraction and interest from the desired woman. Naturals convey this information as a given, in an inherent way. Such higher value can include, humor, social status, wealth, education, leader of men, protector of loved ones, non-neediness, appropriate displays of emotion, health, power, style, ‘pre-selection’ (he is desired by other women of value) and related attributes of a ‘successful’ or ‘alpha’ male.

The seduction community, also known as the pickup artist or PUA community, is a movement of men whose goal is seduction and sexual success with/access to women. Members of the community often call themselves pickup artists (PUA). The community exists through Internet newsletters and weblogs, marketing, forums and groups, including local clubs, known as “lairs”.

The social Darwinism of the club or bar, can be approached like a science, by self-titled self-made men. In the Community, players are self-made; most renowned pick-up artists claim they were socially awkward losers until they learned the tricks of the trade. If a pick-up artist hones his “inner game” (confidence) as well as his “outer game” (appearance), he can control his sexual future. When women come with cheat codes, rejection is not an option; if a play fails, the player tweaks his strategy instead of conceding defeat. In the end of the text, in a hypercompetitive world, Strauss has confronted his fears, and won.

5.2 Brief History of Game and the Seduction Community

- Maxell Maltz theory of Psycho-Cybernetics in 1960, proposes mind-power in self-help with a ‘cyber feel’, through NLP, Neuro Linguistic Programming, where desired feelings, patterns and behaviors can be ‘uploaded’ to one’s brain, and to others’, similar to computer software and programming language, using words, suggestions, gestures, and touch (or Kinesthetics, shortened to ‘Kino’ in the seduction community) to anchor these suggestions to the ‘target’, or girl that one desires, influencing her subconscious.
- In 1970, Eric Weber's *How to Pick Up Girls* is first published, and sells over a million copies in the 1980s⁵⁸⁸, and was rereleased in revised editions. Conceptualizes pickup as self-help.
- Richard Bandler and John Grinder release 1979 self-help book ‘*Frogs into Princes*’, influenced by Maltz’s work. It concerns NLP, further developing the ‘technology’.
- Modern seduction community pioneer Ross Jeffries becomes seduction guru, writing ‘*How to Get the Women You Desire into Bed*’⁵⁸⁹ which contained his ‘Speed Seduction’ method, and releasing *Advanced Speed Seduction* tapes. Jeffries’ method of seduction is based on NLP, initially influence by Maltz and Bandler and Grinder’s work. He is influenced by self-help and self-improvement titan Anthony Robbins, who also uses NLP, with his idea of marketing Speed Seduction on the internet, distribution techniques, such as CDs.
- Online internet presence of the community emerges in newsgroup and online discussion board/forum⁵⁹⁰ alt.seduction.fast, initially as a way to promote Jeffries’ ‘Speed Seduction’. Forum founded in 1994 by programmer Louis DePayne, a student of Jeffries. The forum provides a meeting place for other pickup gurus, (who go on to form different schools of seduction) who share technique information, and ‘field reports’.
- Launched in the late 1990s⁵⁹¹, Cliff’s List is a website where pickup artists gather, and has an email list where seduction tips and stories are contained.
- David DeAngelo, another student of Jeffries, markets his e-book ‘*Double Your Dating*’, in the late 1990s, and in 2001. He then organizes seminars, and gathers the best of the seduction community gurus for co-released products and talks. His material often synthesizes the work of one or more other PUA gurus, and is effectively marketed and presented.⁵⁹² These are mainstream-oriented products, exploring the concept of attraction, advising on how to be more of a ‘bad boy’ and masculine, using the attitude of ‘cocky and funny’, that is self-confidence mixed with humor.
- Erik von Markovik, using the alias/handle/username/pseudonym/alter ego/pickup name ‘Mystery’, further advances seduction techniques and terminology, through extensive social experimentation and fieldwork, linking courtship to evolutionary psychology, group theory, ‘field testing’ routines, which he calls the

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 124.

⁵⁸⁹ *Cliff’s List* website.

⁵⁹⁰ Strauss, N. 2005.

⁵⁹¹ *Stylelife* website [https://web.stylelife.com/pick-up-artist-2/cliffs-list-seduction-tips/].

⁵⁹² Strauss, N. 2005.

‘Mystery Method’⁵⁹³, in the late 1990s/early 2000s. This is a structured form of Game. He invents much of the jargon, and the ways in which to teach pickup to others, as an instructor, in workshops called ‘Bootcamps’, which are immersive and usually comprise two or three days, seminars for theory, and going out into the field for practice of techniques.⁵⁹⁴ He pioneers a groundbreaking and much emulated theory and concept of dating, seduction, courtship and socializing, the ‘art of cold approach pickup’ with techniques such as openers, negs, sets, kino escalation, isolation, winging, target, obstacle, DHV, disqualifier, HB10, push/pull, bait, hook, reel, release, comfort, peacocking, attraction phase, and many others. In essence, he invents/discovers Game, and majorly contributes to alt.seduction.fast forum, and other online newsgroups and discussion boards. Mentors and befriends Neil Strauss, dubs him ‘Style’, and is a major character in ‘The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists’. Subsequently releases a couple of books, DVDs, CDs and a couple of e-books, detailing his methods – ‘The Venusian Arts Handbook’ in 2005, ‘The Mystery Method: How to Get Beautiful Women into Bed’ in 2007, ‘Revelation’ in 2008 and ‘The Pickup Artist’ in 2010. He also has a TV reality show, called ‘The Pickup Artist’⁵⁹⁵ which runs for two seasons, each with eight episodes, 2007 – 2008. Along with ‘The Game’, he is credited with bringing Game to mainstream awareness. Initially enters public consciousness due to Strauss’ ‘The Game’, then starts his Venusian Arts company.

- Neil Strauss writes a pickup themed article in the New York Times in 2004⁵⁹⁶, and ‘The Game’, an account of Strauss’ two years spent with the seduction community, is released in 2005 and is a bestseller, exposing the underground community of pickup artists, and the idea of Game, to a global mainstream. He subsequently starts a seduction company and school of pickup called ‘Stylelife Academy’, and with accompanying DVDs, CDs, website (Stylelife founded in 2007), internet forum, and a how-to book entitled ‘Rules of the Game’ in 2008, which is comprised of rules of Game and seduction methods, and the second half comprising of further gonzo stories of his sarging (going out into the field to seduce and pickup women) and gaming, which serve as somewhat cautionary tales, admitting that there can be a dark side to pursuing excellence in Game. In 2012 he released ‘Who’s Got Game? The Game With Benefits!’, a board game⁵⁹⁷, with questions and answers for players, based on Game theories and models, and he has a website neilstrauss.com, which has elements of Game and other self-improvement articles.
- RSD, or Real Social Dynamics, further brings Game and pickup knowledge and theory to the masses, and especially from 2011 onwards, is the most successful pickup related company in the world. It focuses on congruency, less on canned routines and scripted openers, and more on natural Game, and occasionally direct Game, and other aspects of life improvement such as business, learning, motivation, health and fitness.

After leaving The New York Times to ghostwrite Jenna Jameson's memoirs, Strauss joined a sub-culture of pick-up artists known as the seduction community, creating the persona of "Style" in 2001 and pseudonym of "Chris Powles", eventually publishing an article in the New York Times about his experiences in 2004⁵⁹⁸.

The book ‘The Game’ was on the New York Times Bestseller List for two months after its release in September 2005 and number one on Amazon.com, reaching prominence again in 2007 during the broadcast of the VH1 television series The Pickup Artist, which was hosted by Mystery, Strauss's mentor in the book.⁵⁹⁹ It was originally published in a hardcover format, covered in black leather and bookmarked with red satin, similar to some printings and versions of the Bible. Despite the reputation that The Game has gained as an exposé on the seduction community, it was primarily

⁵⁹³ Flory, T. C. 2007. *The Artful Seducer*. Salon magazine. “The women in my life, they’re good friends. I’ve never hidden any of this pickup stuff from them. If you had to hide pickup secrets from a woman, I think those secrets would be unethical. During my boot camps, over the years, I’ve invited girlfriends to these events. And, really, they’re great sounding boards. I get to find out what they feel is moral or immoral.” “I’m fascinated by psychology and one aspect of psychology, if you’re going to zoom into it a little bit, is sexual psychology. We’re not out to try to figure out the opposite sex, we’re trying to figure out ourselves. If we could reverse-engineer the way the emotional circuits in our brain work, how they function and why and how they systematically trigger when we’re faced with certain events, we could figure out how to do it right. How do you approach a woman without freaking her out? A woman wants to align with a man of high value. How can a man systematically convey his value to a woman if she won’t even let him? A woman, by the time she’s 23 years old, if she’s a beautiful young lady, she’s going to have been hit on a good 7,500 times. So we have to approach differently. We can’t approach saying, “Wow, I like you, do you like me?” There are some differences among men and women when it comes to our attraction circuits. A man’s circuits are calibrated primarily to respond to a woman’s replication value — to her hip to waist ratio, facial symmetry, breast shape and size, health characteristics, and all that, right? And a woman, her attraction mechanism is evolutionarily calibrated to respond to more of a man’s social value. In other words, when I hang out with a woman, I don’t hang out with her because I need to be protected. Men, we respond to her replication value. Women, they respond primarily to a man’s survival value or social value. The purpose of life is to survive and replicate and we’ve got 28,000 days — all of us — approximately, give or take, to make that happen.”

⁵⁹⁴ *Ask Mystery* website.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Pickup Artist*. [http://www.vh1.com/shows/the_pickup_artist/season_1/series.jhtml].

⁵⁹⁶ Strauss, N. 2004. *He Aims! He Shoots! Yes!!*

⁵⁹⁷ Strauss, N. 2012.

⁵⁹⁸ Strauss, N. 2004.

⁵⁹⁹ Jacobs, A. 2005. *‘The Game’: Come Here Often?*

written as an autobiographical work. The how-to side of Game is covered in Strauss' follow up book 'The Rules of the Game'.

5.3 Summary of the Story

The book comes across like a combination of diary, investigative journalism, self-help/how-to and confessional. It is non-fiction. It is a chronicle of Strauss' journey and experiences in the seduction community. The tone is self-aware, authentic, conversational, honest and wry, easy to read and engaging. It is, in many ways, the story of a man who becomes a hero to many, or the triumph of an 'underdog'.

Neil Strauss is a journalist and writer who writes for Rolling Stone and the New York Times and the LA Times. He is also known by the nom de jour 'Style' and penname Chris Powles. As the book starts, he has written books with rock stars such as Motley Crue, Dave Navarro and Marilyn Manson, and the porn star Jenna Jameson. Strauss has also contributed to magazines such as Esquire, Maxim, Spin, Entertainment Weekly, Details, and The Source, in addition to writing liner notes for albums by Nirvana and others. Also, he has appeared in a few music artist's videos, notably Beck's 'Sexx Laws', and Thirty Seconds to Mars' 'Up In The Air', as well as an episode of comedy 'Curb Your Enthusiasm', and as a non-participant in a Jenna Jameson video. He won the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for his coverage of Kurt Cobain's suicide for Rolling Stone and his profile of Eric Clapton in The New York Times Arts & Leisure section.

Yet, despite seeing debaucherous goings on, free sex and orgies, he has had relatively little sexual experience, other than a few long term relationships. Upon being asked by his editor to rewrite a how-to manual found online by another author, Strauss discovers an underground world of pickup artists who dedicate their time to getting better at meeting and seducing women. He begins to participate in online discussions held by these PUAs, due to the frustration he has with his own love life.

Strauss laments the fact that men are not taught in school, in society or at home how to seduce women effectively, there are no courses that you can take, and men in general do not tell their sons how to bed women. Thus, modern men are missing many skillsets and technologies that are required for a successful life. (Strauss' follow up book after 'Rules of the Game', is 'Emergency', and deals with gaining skills in second citizenship, urban and rural survivalists, learning self-defense and martial arts, prepping for disasters, tracking, economic safeguards, and so on).

As he becomes more involved in the community, Strauss attends a bootcamp conducted by a man identified as "Mystery". The bootcamp consists of Strauss and other participants approaching women, with then Mystery and his assistant "Sinn" giving them corrective advice on their behaviors, body language, and what to say. Mystery advises him and his other students to reduce their 'approach anxiety' by thinking of pickup as a video game, as not real.⁶⁰⁰

Strauss narrates how he goes through the stages of becoming a pickup artist, description about members of the community and how Strauss befriends many of them, particularly Mystery. Much of the book describes how to level the playing field in attraction scenarios, how to make relationships more equal. The book is clearly aimed at heterosexual men, although it can be enjoyed by anyone, considering social dynamics and power relations. Strauss also shows how he contributes to the evolution of Game by describing his concept of FTC or 'False Time Constraints', and 'cheat sheets' of lines and routines to use, which can be glanced at subtly even during conversations when out socially.

The story progresses as Strauss gains more success, describing the spreading of the seduction community, and his life at "Project Hollywood", which is a high-end mansion and a lifestyle plan shared by Strauss, Mystery, Playboy, Papa, Tyler Durden, Herbal, and other members of the seduction community. Strauss notes that while the initial point of studying pickup artistry was women, the result turned out to be men.⁶⁰¹ He details how rivalries and animosity between members of the community lead to Project Hollywood's collapse and documents the start of "Real Social Dynamics" the social dynamic/seduction company with Tyler Durden and Papa. RSD is a company that, for Strauss in the book, exemplifies the mindset of social robots⁶⁰². Initially founded in the shadow of Mystery's and Style's successes, and (again, initially) completely copying their way of doing things, Real Social Dynamics seeks to compete with them; and through manipulation and 'sinister' tactics, as described in the book, succeed at this. RSD and its founder Tyler Durden are painted in a bad light. They serve as the book's bad guy(s). Today, RSD and Durden, whose real name is Owen Cook, teach natural game, and are currently the biggest pickup company in the world.

⁶⁰⁰ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 19.

⁶⁰¹ Strauss, N. 2005. P. 289. "Instead of models in bikinis lounging by the Project Hollywood pool all day, we had pimply teenagers, bespectacled businessmen, tubby students, lonely millionaires, struggling actors, frustrated taxi drivers, and computer programmers – lots of computer programmers. They walked in our door AFCs; they came out players."

⁶⁰² *ibid.* pp. 238, 239, 288, 289, 292, 300 – 303, 391, 426 – 429.

Strauss mentions his experiments with sleeping habits, personal grooming tips, and encounters with celebrities such as Scott Baio, Tom Cruise, Andy Dick, Paris Hilton, Courtney Love, Dennis Rodman, and Britney Spears.

Mystery repeatedly states that as a pickup artist, his goal is to seduce two loving bisexual girlfriends, who would serve as his sex slaves, and as assistants in his magic shows as he travels the world as an illusionist (which is his former career).⁶⁰³ Strauss describes Mystery as destroying many chances for stable relationships with beautiful and great girls, due to his focusing on making his fantasy a reality. Critics use this as example of the failings of being polyamorous, a more (allegedly) shallow emotional connection with a greater amount of people, and in this way, more safe and less “work”.

Strauss concludes that a life of nothing but picking up women is not healthy, and he advocates incorporating pickup artist methods into a more balanced life. The journey that Strauss takes in the book, is one that is shared in some ways by the other major ‘characters’ of the pickup community. That is, his transformation from a man who only had a few sexual experiences and girlfriends, and wished to be able to meet and attract women, to a man secure and confident in himself, successful in life and with the opposite sex. Strauss, under the tutelage of these men, evolves, almost like an everyman hero or a phoenix, into master pickup artist Style, and even founds his own school – Stylelife Academy. Mystery goes from being a geeky kid and loner, a self-confessed “late bloomer” who loses his virginity at the age of 21, to the world’s best pickup artist.

Ross Jeffries, is described as a failed stand-up comedian and screenwriter. He comes across in the book as a resentful, lonely and frustrated person⁶⁰⁴, who utilizes NLP to seduce women and ends a five year period without sex. He then creates Speed Seduction and helps frustrated men.

David DeAngelo is another ‘character’ in the book, a former student of Jeffries who is described as having a breakthrough in figuring out how attraction works by studying those naturally good with women⁶⁰⁵; an AFC turned PUA, although DeAngelo says he does not teach seduction (which implies “trickery, enticement, and dishonesty”) but “attraction”.

There are still naturals in ‘The Game’, such as the Croatian PUA Badboy, yet the majority of material and the instructors identifies with and is geared towards AFCs – modern males with socially conditioned ideas of the workings of the attraction process that pickup artists have evolved beyond.

The acquisition of confidence and personal worth are strictly required in order to succeed at the Game. A lot of low self-esteem individuals will read this book and become, I believe, better men. The message at the end is one of self-love and acceptance. Once an individual can get used to rejection and make a breakthrough, there is light at the end of the tunnel, socially. Putting women on a pedestal will not get men anywhere, they must learn to play the game right. In the book, Strauss is impressed with the ways that this community is so organized and sophisticated it is in its methods, akin to social scientists. They read a lot of books about evolution because they want to tap into the primal brain. They field-test their techniques hundreds and thousands of times, figuring out what is not contained within psychology research papers or books. This is extraordinary, that a group of such people figured out the ‘secrets’ to seduction and attraction. Before learning Game, Strauss would sit and watch everyone else have the fun. In a sense, “The Game” is a memoir of two extraordinary years in his life, after he has already made a name for himself by writing about culture and rock music for the New York Times and co-writing biographies on Motley Crue and porn star Jenna Jameson. Strauss’ career was already hugely successful, due to him being a workaholic, yet he was not successful with women, instead being awkward and afraid to talk to them. One of the book’s biggest turns is when the former journalist AFC becomes the seduction master pickup artist guru, number one in the world. In the process, when he writes of himself in his book, he is not afraid to look stupid, or retell something that is embarrassing, lending honesty and authenticity to the account.

While it is not billed as a how-to book, it does contain enough information and material to help the average reader get more success in women and in life. In effect, he is helping men and women to mate. No matter if men are ‘armed’ with the best seduction ‘technology’, the woman still holds the power, and ultimately is the one who chooses if the interaction goes forward.

There is the cautionary tale embedded within the book: dark arts not being used well enough, a ‘Lord of the Flies’ meets ‘Fight Club’ scenario at the shared PUA mansion Project Hollywood, the book offers multiple perspectives on Strauss’ journey, the seduction community, and the Game itself. Like a memoir, the book shows a personal transformation and growth by its author at the end, when he finds love, after going to a ‘dark place’ and surviving, returning an illuminated and enriched person.

⁶⁰³ *ibid.* pp. 168, 171, 193, 324.

⁶⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 38.

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid.* pp. 130, 131.

Strauss concedes that the Game has a dark side, and he dealt with the backlash that the books' success garnered, very well. There were immediate outcries by feminists and mainstream media, that the book and people within it are misogynist and hating of women. Strauss' response to these naysayers, who usually do not investigate the thinking or circumstances behind Game, is that he did not want to censor the men talking. He wanted to be honest about how guys talk, and the fact that they are vulnerable. If men aired their thoughts and feelings all the time, they would be outcasts, he says. It makes one question the way that social structures in man-woman relations are embedded and held by feminine behavioral memes and patterns. Yet there is no denying that the Game techniques work, and perhaps the feminist critics are afraid to look in the mirror and ask questions about the true nature of female behavior and response.⁶⁰⁶

In this chapter I have provided an overview, description and discussion of the material that is analyzed in this dissertation.

In the following chapter, I analyze the material.

⁶⁰⁶ Jacobs, A. 2005. "Call it a permutation of the tired old saw that 'boys will be boys,' but even a radical feminist would have to concede that total honesty is no kind of dating strategy. In a post about The Game, one writer on www.feministblogs.org offered an alternative to the formula used by expert PUAs: 'Shake my hand. [Say] 'Hi, my name is...' Treat me like a human being. Avoid seeing women as conquests and men as competition.'" Strauss responds, "If that worked, I wouldn't have had to write this book."

6. Analysis

In this chapter, using narrative analysis, I shall analyze Neil Strauss' book, 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists'.

I outline the method's application to the material's analysis first, then briefly discuss the shape of the narrative and author's journey as a character within it.

For the main analysis, I do a deep analysis of the first half of the book, using narrative analysis and referring to the theorists and theories discussed in Chapter Three, which finds meanings and contexts which apply to the material as a whole.

Following this, I do a broader macro multiperspectival reading of the second half of the book, examined through the research question and auxiliary questions, also referencing the theorists discussed in Chapter Three, with a lighter use of narrative analysis.

I approached the material in this way, to avoid saturation of materials.

I choose this way of analyzing the material due to the reflexive and oscillating nature of my style of research, and also due to time economic reasons.

I shall refrain from a more thorough analysis of pickup and Game in general, however at some points it will be necessary to provide explanatory descriptions. To tackle the themes and issues that the text raises, I look through the prisms of various theorists, using, among others, the works of Bauman, Giddens, Kimmel and Kress. My analysis of the text was done using narrative analysis.

The book is both a celebratory and a cautionary tale. In promotion of the material, Strauss, who was in a serious relationship at the time, spoke of the 'dark side' of pickup, the social robots, the way pickup can take over people's lives, make them drop out of college. Yet, he also spoke of the benefits, of seeing men improve in their romantic and overall life quality. The normative media and feminist critiques saying that men should just go and find a girlfriend or marry or a soulmate – traditionalist, are somewhat out of touch with both science and a moving postmodern culture, once immersed in the seduction community, other ways of life seem antiquated and redundant to a lot of the characters, this is stated or implied. By thinking of pickup as a 'video game', it makes some pickup artists get caught up in mastering the skill of pickup itself and in trying to beat their previous scores, or pickup artists risk losing 'their soul'. The narrative can be viewed from many angles, and this is Strauss' intent.

To start, I outline my application of the method to the analysis of the material.

6.1 Application of Method to the Material Analysis

Primarily using the work of Herman et al⁶⁰⁷, and Daiute and Lightfoot⁶⁰⁸ on narrative analysis, I look at Strauss' book 'The Game'. I shall skew towards a rhetorical reading of the text⁶⁰⁹, that is an act rather than an object, a purposive communication from one person or group of persons, to one or more others. In this case, narrative itself is an event, which is multidimensional. This focus is connected to interest in the ways that elements of any narrative are shaped in the service of larger ends. Narrative is a multileveled communication, according to Phelan and Rabinowitz⁶¹⁰, so that there is a meaning and an experience of it. The rhetorical approach is most concerned with the author telling something to his audience. In this case, the author is speaking directly – as far as someone can tell, who is familiar with his previous work – in his own voice, and the piece is nonfiction. The audience that the author seems to be addressing, is both himself, and those who might be empathetic and understanding enough to care about his experiences and point of view – that of a kid who has been denied chocolate, as one negative reviewer puts it⁶¹¹, and suddenly finds himself inside a chocolate factory. In this case, it might be a way to explain his need to learn these techniques for attracting women, the need to expose a powerful and hypocritical underside of social interactions and the ways in which to change these, a way to let men such as himself know that there is hope for them yet in gaining experience with women, no matter their looks or status in life, and interesting and magnetic stories and social occurrences that happened in his 'undercover' ethnographical experience with the most prominent members of the (then) underground community of pickup artists.

How a story or narrative is presented, then received and interpreted by an audience, is contingent on a number of variables. Taking this into account, and using the theory that I have outlined thus far, I shall analyze the author's main points and highlights of the story, from a social-relevant perspective, utilizing the tools of narrative analysis. In the background, there are ideas of Foucault's 'technologies of the self'.⁶¹² In some sense, there are traces of a discourse analysis sensibility, however, this method was abandoned due to time constraints.

Narrative data analysis involves a lot of intuition, which, in the social sciences, must be balanced with great deals of referencing and reflexivity.⁶¹³ Identity claims are one pivotal concern in narrative, these take place in an intersubjective space. In telling the story in one's life, we avoid telling other stories, which brings up issues of denial, repression, and displacement. After 'The Game' was published, however, there has not been any media presence of the 'characters' in the book complaining about misrepresentation or disputes. On the meta scale of things, the self is to a large extent created by stories, stories that we tell ourselves, that we tell others, and that are told to us. Stories can be considered 'transitional phenomena', not wholly objective nor subjective, facilitating or constraining for human creativity. In this study, the individual is located as a narrative subject. As such, there is the need to link various theories and observations found when reading the text, and presenting them as analysis, with the proviso that it may raise more questions than it answers. Discursive positioning suggests important links between the individual and the social.⁶¹⁴ The reliability of narrative is a constant concern. The relations between narrative and subjectivity is an area under examination by many researchers at present, as is performance and narrative. If done correctly, narrative analysis allows us a glimpse into the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavors.

Genre analysis shows how genres can be similar between, 'high' and 'low' culture and across media.⁶¹⁵ This intersects cultural and media studies, as well as social science. Placing 'The Game' within a genre is difficult, as it is located in self-help, lifestyle, fiction and autobiography, as well as sex and relationships sections in bookshops and libraries. Genre appears fluid and negotiable.

Coming back to subjectification, 'technologies of the self' let individuals effect, by themselves or with others, operations on their bodies, minds, and behavior so that they can change themselves⁶¹⁶, theorized by Foucault of the

⁶⁰⁷ Herman, D., Phelan, J., Rabinowitz, P. J., Richardson, B. and Warhol, R. 2012. Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates.

⁶⁰⁸ Daiute, C. and Lightfoot, C. 2004. Narrative Analysis.

⁶⁰⁹ Herman, D., Phelan, J., Rabinowitz, P. J., Richardson, B. and Warhol, R. 2012. Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates. "[...] rhetorical narrative theory maintains its interest in how narratives seek to achieve their multidimensional purposes even as it strives to be sufficiently flexible to respond to the diversity of narrative acts."

⁶¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹¹ McCartney, J. 2005. He's simply irresistible. "But the larger and more truthful impression is of Strauss's sustained glee at his belated flush of sexual excess, rather like a boy - long denied chocolate - who suddenly finds himself with the run of the Cadbury's factory."

⁶¹² Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J. F. and Silverman, D. (ed.). 2007. Qualitative Research Practice.

⁶¹³ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ *ibid.*

social nature of spatiality and its interdependent relation with power and subjectivity. Space and place affects self-representation practices, in other words.

Strauss travels literally and metaphorically on his way to become a master pickup artist, travelling through places and 'heterotopias' as Foucault writes – sites outside of society. Like Moses, he comes down from the mountain with the stone tablets, transformed by his experience and knowledge, or technology, which he has applied.⁶¹⁷ He chooses to eschew the popular narratives fed by mainstream society on how to woo women, and instead examines and tackles head on these problems in a logical and rational manner.

In a general sense, narrative analysis identifies the basic story being told, focusing on the way an account or narrative is constructed, the intention of the teller, and the nature of the audience, as well as the meaning of the story.⁶¹⁸ Non-cross-sectional data organization looks at particular parts of the data separately, which gets a sense of the distinctiveness of particular sections of the material, to understand complex narratives or processes. There are various types of narrative analysis, and some can reflect the way in which the subjects of the story give meaning to their lives.

The progression of a narrative is how an author achieves his purpose, so this is an element that must be examined. Understanding the principles of the construction of the narrative, if possible, also greatly illuminates the meaning and understanding of the text.⁶¹⁹ Textual dynamics are the internal processes by which narratives move from beginning, through middle to ending, while readerly (and here, it must be pointed out, that I as a reader, am involving my impressions and analysis of the text) dynamics are the corresponding cognitive, affective, ethical, and aesthetic responses of the audience to those textual dynamics.⁶²⁰ The bridge between textual dynamics and readerly dynamics is formed by narrative judgements: interpretative, ethical and aesthetic. These are encoded in the narrative and yet made by readers, leading to multilayered responses. The narrative audience is a role that the reader takes on while reading, the narrator is a character position in the text. The approach of this form of rhetorical narrative analysis is essentially pragmatic.

Audiences develop interests and responses of three kinds, mimetic (involving judgments, emotions, desires and so on), thematic (involving ideational function of 'characters' and the cultural, ideological, philosophical or ethical issues being addressed by the narrative) and synthetic (involving the audience's interest in and attention to 'characters' and the narrative).⁶²¹ Developments in the course of a narrative can generate new relations among those interests.

Narrative and identity (of characters, or of the author) are closely interwoven.⁶²² Narrative can fill the void of identity. There are anti-narrativist stances that presuppose that identity is something that can only be experienced as a unity of the self for a few seconds at a time, claiming that we experience our lives episodically.⁶²³ Still there are others who claim that narrative is a function of language, and nothing much more. It is generally supposed that we construct narratives to make sense of our lives, while other scholars believe that it actually forms identities, and is a cognitive instrument, inherent in humans – an evolutionary drive towards greater complexity, linked with morality and altruism. In effect, this says that storytelling is nonconscious, beyond language. Yet more views hold that both cultural and cognitive forces shape narrative and identity. Related disciplines such as folkloristics, anthropology, ethnology, micro-sociology, psychology, philosophy, developmental studies, evolutionary sciences and cultural studies have differing and overlapping ideas on narrative. However, narrative has been largely ignored in sociology, despite Habermas' and Bourdieu's complex theories on communication and culture.⁶²⁴ Neumann et al's book asks about the mismatch between the evolutionary stage that mankind has reached, and the late modern society it has created, with narrative studies being of use in bridging the gap. This recalls Mystery's proclamation of humans being still emotionally hardwired as in cave man times, but situated in modernity with over seven billion inhabitants in a globalized society.

Life is not a narrative story, and people exist whether they tell their story or not. Self and story, though, are mutually constituting aspects of a single process of identity formation. Narratives are constructed. Similarly, memory is an

⁶¹⁷ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 9. "If the layguide had never crossed my path, I, like most men, would never have evolved in my thinking about the opposite sex."

⁶¹⁸ Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. 2009. Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers.

⁶¹⁹ Herman, D., Phelan, J., Rabinowitz, P. J., Richardson, B. and Warhol, R. 2012. Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates. "Coming to understand the principles that underlie its progression from a particular starting point to a particular ending point provides an excellent way to understand a narrative's design and its purposes."

⁶²⁰ *ibid.*

⁶²¹ *ibid.*

⁶²² Neumann, B., Nunning, A. and Pettersson, B. (eds.). 2008. Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses.

⁶²³ *ibid.*

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*

activity occurring in the present, where the past is continuously modified and re-described⁶²⁵, dependent on the person's goals and purposes at the time that they recall it. Thus, the relation between memory, narrative and the self is contingent on many complexities. Narrative imposes chronological understanding of events in a forward and backward direction, and also indicates relations between events, making them comprehensible. Sameness and unity, but differentness from others, is sustained through narratives. Narratives about self are as much historical as they are personal, and involve the constitution of one's own culture. While stories are present tellings of past events, their resonance is revealed only in the future.⁶²⁶ So, the task of the narrative researcher is to discern the authorial intent of the subject, how it shifts and is stable. In general, the researcher aims at a creative rendering of the subject's life according to evidence that may be taken from different sources, not only narrative.

6.2 The Author's and Narrative's Journey Within the Text of 'The Game'

The Game starts with Strauss telling the reader that he is worlds' second greatest pickup artist, it then switches for a short chapter to disclose how Strauss was before all of the story which will comprise the book itself. In the beginning of the book, amidst dramatic chaos, Strauss introduces Mystery immediately, as one of the main 'characters' of the book, and indeed a major person in Strauss' own life. He also tells the reader his own 'underground' name, Style. There are no exact dates given in the book when events are mentioned.

We can see Strauss' character arc from professionally respected New York Times bestselling author – not quite an 'average Joe' – to superhero, in this narrative. He initially wants to learn Game from gurus of the 'art', to be able to sleep with women of his choice. Quickly, he rises in the ranks of the subculture, so that he, after about a year and half, is a teacher and guru himself, inventing his own methods and materials, and being named 'Best Pickup Artist in the World'. Socially, at least when it is concerning his interactions with women, it is a tale of rags to riches, one which gives hope to the everyman.

The book was published in 2005, and Neil Strauss entered the subculture at an undetermined time, somewhere near the turn of the millennium. It is primarily set in Los Angeles, California, and in the social and club scene there, although significant portions of the book take place in Toronto, Canada, where Mystery is from, Eastern Europe, Australia, and various locations worldwide, as Strauss sarges women and co-teaches bootcamps with Mystery.

Strauss goes for a happy ending for his book (he finds love – apparently the Game did not work on Lisa, but in effect it did, because she was hanging with him before they had sex...), hints at a sequel, and even hints that he may not have entirely given up the game.

In 'The Game', the author is the narrator. He shows reflexivity, bravado, introspection, sensitivity and a ruthlessness, all of various measure and at different times.

According to media and online discussion, the audience for the book is heterosexual men, primarily. This is never stated anywhere though, and there are strong female characters in the book too, such as Lisa, Style's girlfriend, and Katya, and Courtney Love. Everyone, however, is imbalanced in various ways also.

The Game – both the book and the practice – resists the overreaching narrative of most dating scenarios or 'acceptable' or 'received wisdom' behavior in western society.

There is a mechanism, by labelling it as a success story, to explore how social actors frame and make sense of particular sets of experiences, from which further questions and analyses can occur. The delivery impact of the story can be partly due to the way it is organized, which details are used to contextualize, comparisons with other events and theses set up a story. Why the story is told, its purpose, falls under the narrative as chronicle label.

The telling of events, at least when considering a paperback/hardcover book (I am not taking into consideration eBook or audiobook versions of 'The Game' in this study) usually occurs after their occurrence. However, the writing of these events, can happen simultaneously as they occur, for example, there is a passage in the book where Strauss is having

⁶²⁵ *ibid.* "Such stories are the narratives that we create as we orient our *present* needs, choices and actions in the light of our imagined *futures* and the version of our *pasts* that best suit these projects..."

⁶²⁶ Daiute, C. and Lightfoot, C. 2004. *Narrative Analysis*. "...narrating is an objectification of experience that extends beyond time and authorial intent, [so that] the meanings of a text are overdetermined, subject to alternative readings and alternative tellings, each more than the author supposes.

sex with a woman, while he is sitting typing on his computer. This makes for a humorous, striking and immediate portion. Events can also be foretold. There does not seem to be a single or best definition for narrative, so in this sense the method is very flexible and reflective. This plays into a feedback loop with authorial agency, textual phenomena, intertextual relations, and reader response. There is the assumption here that texts are designed by authors to affect readers in particular ways, evinced through occasions, words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions that readers use to understand them. Due to the scope of the present study, reader responses to 'The Game' are not examined, however, these can also serve as an initial guide to the workings of a text, although misreadings and misunderstandings are possible. Responses, however, can be a test of the effectiveness of the narrative design. Considering the fact that the book is a bestseller, and among the most stolen books in the western world, Strauss has done something right in capturing readers' attention, his writing is entertaining and is accessible, he also chooses interesting topics to write about.

As to what genre 'The Game' falls under, it can be seen as a form of social science, a memoir, an ethnographic investigation, undercover journalism, gonzo journalism...the text is flexible and open to various readings. It has impacted mainstream culture, in overt and covert ways. One example is the word 'alpha' being used a lot in TV shows and movies.

Narrators use particular linguistic devices to hold their accounts together and communicate meaning to readers.⁶²⁷ How Strauss positions himself relative to the reader, is in many respects on the same level, as one would speak to a confidant. In other respects, he is like the winner of a lottery, and in still others he can be borderline gloating, though his earlier humility and disclosures seem to forgive this in the reader's mind.⁶²⁸

The meaning of the text is the intended meaning, and so is not hermeneutical from the author's side. It is told in a storytelling, entertaining way, as opposed to a more journalistic report type of fashion. Developing core confidence, not situational confidence, is what the Game, both book and method, are teaching their audience. There is still a misconception is it is about shortcuts, both narrative and personal.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ Riessman, C. K. 2000. *Analysis of Personal Narratives*.

⁶²⁸ *ibid*. "Narrators can position themselves, for example, as victims of one circumstance or another in their tales, giving over to other characters the power to initiate action, not themselves. Alternatively, narrators can position themselves as agentic beings that assume control over events and actions: they purposefully initiate and cause action. They can shift among positions, giving themselves agentic roles in certain scenes, and passive roles in others."

⁶²⁹ *ibid*. "This project of "how a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Foucault, 1988, p. 3) acknowledges tensions between cultural prescriptions and people's lived experiences: "How had the subject been compelled to decipher himself [or herself] in regard to what was forbidden?" (Foucault, 1988, p. 17)." "Telling one's story is, also, very much about presenting one's self in ways that conform to cultural ideals (Harré, & van Langenhoeve, 1999). On the other hand, in Western cultures, narrating one's "best self" (Oliviera, 1999) or heroic self (Freeman, 1998) is also a means for identifying personal subjectivities and goals that distinguish one's self from other selves. Narrating is a form of social positioning (Bamberg, this volume; Stanley & Billig, this volume), even in writing (Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997) where, according to dialogic theory, the audience looms large, although its presence is usually tacit."

6.3 A Close Reading and Narrative Analysis of the First Half of 'The Game'

Coffey and Atkinson propose⁶³⁰ a way in which to analyze text from the narrative standpoint. The outline's goal is to see the ways in which social actors produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge through narratives. Still, their method is limited to the narratives of informants, and neglects events, complications, and consequences. I shall appropriate the key points nonetheless, in an interpretative sense. Coffey and Atkinson cite Labov who argues that narratives have formal, structural properties in relation to their social functions, properties which can be identified and used to interpret each segment of narrative.⁶³¹ The approach that Coffey and Atkinson outline is as follows:

<i>Structure</i>	<i>Question</i>
- Abstract	What was this about?
- Orientation	Who? What? Where? When?
- Complication	Then what happened?
- Evaluation	So what?
- Result	What finally happened?
- Coda	[Finish narrative]

This examines how the author gives shape to the events he recounts, how they make a point, how he packages the narrated events and his reactions to them, and so on. This model, originated by Labov, is called an "evaluation model". Such structural units, while not adhered to perhaps too closely, can help to think about data, to facilitate more general and sociological kinds of analysis.

The abstract initiates the narrative by summarizing the point, or by giving a statement of general proposition which the narrative will exemplify. It is optional.

There is an orientation: situation, time and person.

The complication is the major account of the events that are central to the story, which is the narrated events.

The evaluation highlights the point of the narrative.

The result can follow either the complication or the evaluation, describes the outcome of the events or the resolution of the problems.

The coda is the way that a narrative may end, it is similar to the abstract in that it is not essential. The coda marks the end of the narrative, returning the discourse to the present and marking a possible transition point.

This model does not map onto all narratives with perfect regularity, other analysts identify different structural features to focus on.⁶³² However, this model allows us to see how the narrative is structured, and it offers a perspective from which to reflect on the functions of the story, illuminating key themes and issues, and how the story is constructed to make points, and structured to make it (socially) comprehensible.

Narrative can also be thought of in terms of functions, focusing on the social action within the text.⁶³³ If we are to categorize Strauss' narrative, it can fall under the umbrella of success story and of narrative as chronicle. There is the overcoming of difficulty and the achievement of success present in the former.

This is where experiences are retold, events, happenings, influences and decisions. How people articulate the past is related to the present. Social actors organize their lives through stories. How social actors retell their life experiences as stories can provide insight into the characters, events and happenings central to these experiences.⁶³⁴ In this case, we must be mindful of Strauss employing the 'gonzo' style of writing, where, when he is interviewing subject for magazines and newspapers, for example, he places his own self and experiential view of the interactions and meetings within the actual text. This is thought to lend an air of authenticity to such writing.

⁶³⁰ Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. 1996. *Narratives and Stories*.

⁶³¹ *ibid.* "Attention to the structure of the narrative might include looking at how the story is organized, how the tale is developed, and where and how the narrative begins and ends."

⁶³² *ibid.*

⁶³³ *ibid.* "This can involve taking a slightly less systematic and structured approach to narrative analysis, deriving more context-dependent infrastructure and focus to explain the effect (intended or unintended, implicit or explicit) of the story or tale. This emphasizes the idea that individual narratives are situated within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural and institutional discourses."

⁶³⁴ *ibid.* "How the chronicle is told and how it is structured can also provide information about the perspectives of the individual in relation to the wider social grouping or cultural setting to which that individual belongs."

In a sense, the book can be thought of as Strauss' recounting his 'career' in pickup. There can be distinctions made between objective and subjective careers. Careers are both individually constructed and structurally determined.⁶³⁵ Such a relationship between social processes and personal lives is termed interpretive interactionism. Intertextuality, representations between biography and autobiography, representations of reality and reality itself – the narrative is considered central by many in this as biographical producer, account and framework in which to tell of life.

Narrative analysis counters and complements the culture of fragmentation.⁶³⁶ It also preserves the form of qualitative data. Cultural conventions and norms can be examined using narrative analysis.

The book has had a profound effect upon many men.⁶³⁷ We can view patterns of narratives as opportunities to view what a group of people deem important in the conduct of human affairs. Interactional details of narrating as a way to excavate the ubiquitous yet not always obvious influences of the culture, society, and individuals that shape narrative texts using different ways of focusing on the social-relational quality of narratives in context, suggesting the idea of internarratives – intersubjective symbolic spaces of individual and shared discourse as they resonate in a narrative text and as a narrative thread across time. Narrative texts are, thus, intersubjective – belonging to the context as well as to the author. Narrators are social agents.⁶³⁸ This narrative involves significant character and motivational positioning and agency in the creation of story⁶³⁹

I shall now analyze the book, and where appropriate, connect the content to theory that I have previously mentioned. I shall analyze in detail the first half of the book, relating it to themes and theories already discussed, and my own impressions. After this, I shall analyze on the more macro level the second half of the book, addressing the questions of this dissertation, in relation to the book. The analysis of the first half of the book brings out most of the relevant themes, while time constraints mean the rest of the text is looked at more sparingly.

- Starts with 'This is a true story' claim, which Strauss actually writes is an old literary device
- Dedicated to all the people (girls) he met, stating humorously that they were different, and he was not running game on them
- Dostoyevsky quote
- Asks for forgiveness in advance, and to not hate the player, but hate the game
- The contents are titled with reference to various game terminology and routines – from beginning to end, selecting a target, to managing expectations. These are sections, which he terms 'Steps'.
- There is a glossary of terms used within the seduction community at the end of the book, and an acknowledgments section, where he reassures readers that no man's cover has been blown, that men and women will still meet, and Game will evolve and adapt to new social situations, although the fundamentals will remain the same.
- He begins each chapter with a quote from a noted feminist author or academic. For instance the quote on page four is from Betty Friedan.
- First section – Step One – is called 'Select a Target'.
- Introduces Mystery first, in the first chapter "Meet Mystery" in the middle of the story/events – Mystery is having a bipolar breakdown. He says that Mystery is his best friend, his mentor, has changed his life. Then introduces himself. Says Mystery is the world's best pickup artist, and says that he, Strauss, is named as an alias 'Style' in the seduction community, is the second best pickup artist in the world.
- Next chapter is called "Meet Style".

⁶³⁵ *ibid.* "Social actors have their own stories to tell and their own perspectives on what has gone before and what is to come. These stories are mediated by structural dimensions and social arrangements that at least seem outside the control of the social actors."

⁶³⁶ *ibid.*

⁶³⁷ Daiute, C. and Lightfoot, C. 2004. Narrative Analysis. "That narratives can have profound influence on identity development and consequent conduct is readily documented."

⁶³⁸ *ibid.* "Autobiographical narrating is the genre of choice in research and practice because it is usually assumed to be the quintessential identity medium." "When *performing self*, an author orients to the social context, expressing the values and expectations of the audience. In this case, performance-dominated narrating expresses curriculum values, in particular those emphasizing conflict escalation, de-escalation, conflict negotiation strategies, and resolution, especially peaceful resolution. Performing activities thus highlight specific sociocultural aspects of the narrator's self-presentation."

⁶³⁹ *ibid.* "The problem of agency is addressed by giving the subject a semi-agentive status inasmuch as discourses are construed as inherently contradictory and in competition with one another, so that subjects are forced to choose: They agentively pick a position among those available. Thus, positions are resources that subjects can choose and that when practiced for a while become repertoires that can be drawn on." "...the pluralization of identities "disrupts the social ontology of the subject itself... as the internal impossibility of the subject as a discrete and unitary kind of being" (Butler, 1995, p. 446) and, simultaneously, this pluralization opens a new empirical territory for where and how subjects come to existence, that is, sites where positions are actively and interactively taken (and explored) for the purpose of self and world construction."

- With these two chapters, he is unabashedly showing both “characters” weaknesses and strengths. He sets up the fact that the pickup artists had rented a mansion in Los Angeles, and are truly a hub for likeminded people wishing to learn the Venusian Arts. Other “lairs” are mentioned such as in New York, London and Belgrade.⁶⁴⁰ Strauss describes how Mystery is distraught over a girlfriend cheating on him and leaving him. In the “Style” chapter, Strauss details his sexual history prior to discovering pickup and Game, which is nowhere close to what he would have liked, and his amazement at learning about the community, due to the tip from an editor about an online manual, which leads Strauss to discovering internet forums where pickup artists traded and share field reports and new strategies for gaming girls.
- The game is understood as to have been “invented” by women. All women are always “in” the Game. A man has to put in energy, focus and effort into being in the Game, when he goes and “cold-approaches” a woman, with the intent to seduce or attract her. Women, when on their phones, in coffee shops, at the mall, in a club or even online or on their phones, are in the Game – they set the rules. These rules were largely unknown by society at large and indeed science in an explicit or clear way – in a logical and systematic step by step way – until Mystery details them, breaking down dating and the art of attraction to an exact “science”. Methodical, efficient. Cold approach is faster due than online dating, due to when meeting a girl for first time, you are effectively having a first date. Cold approach is a visual read first, then making approach, then seeing if the vibe is good. Online dating, and matchmaking services are not this direct or effective.
- Late bloomer Strauss⁶⁴¹. Sets up the stage for his physical and mental and behavior transformation to come.
- Counter intuitive tactics, for example, it is easier to approach a group of girls, than one solo
- Like a script, except with branches off it that you will choose depending on how the situation is going, known as calibration, eg rocking back on one foot so as to appear that you will leave the conversation at any minute and not be a burden to the woman
- Approaching women do not know, is traumatic and terrifying for majority of men, comes with tons of emotional baggage, and a fear from what is considered our evolutionary forefathers, which makes us err on the side of caution, despite the fact that there are laws and civilities in place, that generally insure that a rock will not be dropped on a man’s head if he goes and talks to a woman that was previously unknown to him
- Immediately and authenticity to the writing
- Game is harnessing data in a smarter way and testing hypothesis and techniques
- choosing the right tool for the job
- Strauss uses humor, profanity, and shock to keep the reader engaged, however, it seems natural and not gratuitous.⁶⁴²
- With his background set out, and assuring readers that he is a good and kind guy, with a nice personality, but who had to change himself in order to become better with women, he outlines how he does so, and sets the stage for the rest of the book, with the behind Mystery’s breakdown circumstances, and the ordinary guy to hero tropes in place, and the homosocial organizing, rituals and groupings that occur in the seduction community.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴⁰ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 7. “...Mystery could out-game them all. It was his hobby, his passion, his calling. There was only one person alive who could possibly compete with him. And that man was sitting in front of her also. From a formless lump of nerd, Mystery had molded me into a superstar. Together, we had ruled the world of seduction. We had pulled off spectacular pickups before the disbelieving eyes of our students and disciples in Los Angeles, New York, Mon-treal, London, Melbourne, Belgrade...”

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 8 and p. 10. “I am far from attractive. My nose is too large for my face and, while not hooked, has a bump in the ridge. Though I am not bald, to say that my hair is thinning would be an understatement [...] In my opinion, my eyes are small and beady, though they do have a lively glimmer [...] I have indentations on either side of my forehead, which I like and believe add character to my face, though I’ve never actually been complimented on them. I am shorter than I’d like to be and so skinny that I look malnourished to most people, no matter how much I eat. When I look down at my pale, slouched body, I wonder why any woman would want to sleep next to it, let alone embrace it. So, for me, meeting girls takes work. I’m not the kind of guy women giggle over at a bar or want to take home when they’re feeling drunk and crazy. I can’t offer them a piece of my fame and bragging rights like a rock star or cocaine and a mansion like so many other men in Los Angeles. All I have is my mind, and nobody can see that.” “The problem wasn’t that I’d never been laid. It was that the few times I did get lucky, I’d turn a one-night stand into a two-year stand because I didn’t know when it was going to happen again. The layguide had an acronym for people like me: AFC—average frustrated chump. I was an AFC.”

⁶⁴² *ibid.* p. 5. “I want to learn martial arts,” he said docilely, “so when I want to kill someone, I can do something about it.” I stepped on the accelerator.”

⁶⁴³ *ibid.* p. 12. “Once I discovered their world, the first thing that changed was my vocabulary. Terms like AFC, PUA (pickup artist), sarging (picking up women), and HB (hot babe) [there is a superscript number (1) here which mentions in footnote the glossary at the back of the book] entered my permanent lexicon. Then my daily rituals changed as I became addicted to the online locker room these pickup artists had created. Whenever I returned home from meeting or going out with a woman, I sat down at my computer and posted my questions of the night on the newsgroups. “What do I do if she says she has a boyfriend?”; “If she eats garlic during dinner, does it mean she isn’t planning on kissing me?”; “Is it a good or a bad sign when a girl puts on lipstick in front of me?” And online characters like Candor, Gunwitch, and Formhandle began replying to my questions. (The answers, in order: use a boyfriend-destroyer pattern; you’re overanalyzing this; neither.) Soon I realized this was not just an Internet phenomenon but a way of life. There were cults of wanna-be seductionists in dozens of cities—from Los Angeles to London to Zagreb to Bombay—who met weekly in what they called lairs to discuss tactics and strategies before going out en masse to meet women. In the guise of Jeremie Ruby-Strauss [the editor who mentions “The Layguide” to Strauss] and the Internet, God had given me a second chance. It wasn’t too late [...] to become

- The second section, or Step Two is titled 'Approach and Open'.
- The first chapter proper details Strauss' attendance at one of Mystery's⁶⁴⁴ bootcamps, and the amazement at how Mystery's techniques with women work. Strauss says that to sign up for a bootcamp is not easy, as it signifies defeat and inferiority, that one has not figured out how to attract women by themselves.⁶⁴⁵ This harkens to Bauman's 'liquid self' theory⁶⁴⁶, that states that a person is perpetually unfinished and striving to keep up with the advancement of society and what is expected. Strauss writes about how he was not going to disclose much personal information to Mystery, even his profession, initially.⁶⁴⁷ The chapter, as most are in the book, is short, and accessible.
- In Chapter two, when arriving at the bootcamp, Strauss is asked how his Game is, that is, how many women he has been with. His reply is six. He looks in awe at Mystery who at that stage has been with hundreds⁶⁴⁸. The other students are described, with a mixture of humor and empathy – they are successful businessman, and a nervous sheltered coder. He describes the nervousness of the students, himself included, and how Mystery talks to assuage these fears – which must simply be ignored, as they are ever-present.⁶⁴⁹ Strauss goes on to explain how Mystery discovered and formulated Game, initially based on group theory, and some of the concepts and techniques are outlined. Alpha males are discussed, in terms of their characteristics and the implication is that by initially aping them, and then by internalizing their mannerisms and behaviors, an aspiring PUA will become congruent and a masterful male himself.⁶⁵⁰ Strauss also postulates that the reason the students were in the bootcamp was because society and their parents and teachers had failed them in properly socializing them as men. The students⁶⁵¹ are given style critiques and told about peacock theory, and also told that nonfactual things they say to women about themselves are not lying, it is flirting. At times, the language describing Game is as of a battle or war, where the students are 'armed' with Game technology.
- Chapter three describes the bootcamp's foray to a couple of clubs. Strauss' model of reality is shattered.⁶⁵² Mystery approaches a 'set' of people, and gets an actor's girlfriends' phone number, in front of the actor, and the students. Further terms are used, and said to have been taken by Mystery from the movie 'Top Gun', and re-appropriated. After getting the girl's number from under the nose of a celebrity, Mystery is considered the real deal, as far as Strauss is concerned. Mystery further explains his Method to Strauss and the other students, including techniques and segments of the linear model. In the second club, Strauss tries to do his first approach

what every woman wants—not what she says she wants, but what she really wants, deep inside, beyond her social programming, where her fantasies and daydreams lie. But I couldn't do it on my own. Talking to guys online was not going to be enough to change a lifetime of failure. I had to meet the faces behind the screen names, watch them in the field, find out who they were and what made them tick. I made it my mission—my full-time job and obsession—to hunt down the greatest pickup artists in the world and beg for shelter under their wings."

⁶⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 15. "He was the most worshipped pickup artist in the community, a powerhouse who spit out long, detailed posts that read like algorithms of how to manipulate social situations to meet and attract women. His nights out seducing models and strippers in his hometown of Toronto were chronicled in inti-mate detail online, the writing filled with jargon of his own invention: sniper negs, shotgun negs, group theory, indicators of interest, pawning— all of which had become an integral part of the pickup artist lexicon."

⁶⁴⁵ *ibid.* "A man has two primary drives in early adulthood: one toward power, success, and accomplishment; the other toward love, companionship, and sex. Half of life then was out of order. To go before [Mystery and the other students] was to stand up as a man and admit that I was only half a man."

⁶⁴⁶ Bauman, Z. 2005.

⁶⁴⁷ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 16. "I wanted to move through this subculture anonymously, without either an advantage or extra pressure because of my credentials."

⁶⁴⁸ *ibid.* "These were the pickup artists whose exploits I'd been following so avidly online for months. They were another class of being: They had the magic pill, the solution to the inertia and frustration that has plagued the great literary protagonists I'd related to all my life..." "I listened carefully. I wanted to make sure every word etched itself on my cerebral cortex. I was attending a significant event; the only other credible pickup artist teaching courses was Ross Jeffries, who had basically founded the community in the late 1980s. But today marked the first time seduction students would be removed from the safe environs of the seminar room and let loose in clubs to be critiqued as they ran game on unsuspecting women."

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 19 and 20. "'All your emotions are going to try to fuck you up,' Mystery continued. 'They are there to try to confuse you, so know right now that they cannot be trusted at all. You will feel shy sometimes, and self-conscious, and you must deal with it like you deal with a pebble in your shoe. It's uncomfortable, but you ignore it. It's not part of the equation.' I looked around; Extramask and Sweater seemed just as nervous as I was. 'I need to teach you, in four days, the whole equation—the sequence of moves you need to win,' Mystery went on. 'And you will have to play the game over and over to learn how to win. So get ready to fail.'"

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 21 and 22. "Besides confidence and a smile, we learned, the other characteristics of an alpha male were being well-groomed, possessing a sense of humor, connecting with people, and being seen as the social center of a room. No one bothered to tell Mystery that those were actually six characteristics. As Mystery dissected the alpha male further, I realized something: The reason I was here—the reason Sweater and Extramask were also here—was that our parents and our friends had failed us. They had never given us the tools we needed to become fully effective social beings. Now, decades later, it was time to acquire them."

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 22. "I wrote down every word of advice. This was a guy who thought about seduction nonstop, like a mad scientist working on a formula to turn peanuts into gasoline. The archive of his Internet messages was 3,000 posts long—more than 2,500 pages—all dedicated to cracking the code that is woman."

⁶⁵² *ibid.* p. 24. "It was here that Mystery shattered my model of reality. Limits I had once imposed on human interaction were extended far beyond what I ever thought possible. The man was a machine."

- after seeing Mystery immediately open a set, and he struggles with saying hello.⁶⁵³ Strauss ‘gets into set’ with a girl, and the instructor/assistant that is with Mystery, ‘Sin’, whispers instructions and concepts to Strauss in the moment, as he is talking to the girl, dropping pickup terminology in the public situation.⁶⁵⁴ Strauss feels ‘alpha’ as he says goodbye to his ‘target’, points to his cheek and says “Kiss good-bye”, and she does so. The chapter ends as Extramask, one of the other students, is at toilet urinals the same time as Strauss, and discloses that he cannot urinate if another male is present. This is told both matter of factly in the book, and with humor.
- Chapter four continues on the same night out, where the bootcamp goes to a third venue. Further Game concepts are discussed between the ‘characters’, relating to the situations they are in, ‘breaking down the approaches’ for example with the girl that Strauss said goodbye to at the previous club. Again, Strauss laments that men have never been told by family or friends, when and how to kiss a girl.⁶⁵⁵ Men are just ‘supposed to know’ various things, often without having been explicitly taught how to do them. With the internet and the community and individual informational powers that it promotes and possesses, and self-help sites such as Lifehacker.com with posts and articles on how to do almost anything in life, in a series of ‘hacks’ or ‘skillsets’, life is now being or beginning to be tackled more holistically in terms of teaching others how to live. Strauss discloses that he begins to question why he is on the bootcamp, and is “obsessed” with learning how to get better with girls from online communities and pickup gurus. That “normal” people would not take such a course. He concludes that he did not feel competent with women, unlike in other areas of his life, and so he wants to be successful with them⁶⁵⁶ in a proactive manner.
 - Chapter five describes the final night of the first bootcamp with Mystery and the students.⁶⁵⁷ Strauss describes the night out, and the increasing success he is having with interactions, with women being more warmly responding. Again, as in a lot of the text, specific Game techniques are interspersed within the dialogue and description of events. The chapter ends when Mystery declares that Strauss is one of them, and that he will be a superstar.
 - Chapter six is a log of a post by Mystery on an MSN group named ‘Mystery’s Lounge’. This is interesting stylistically, as it breaks up the book even further, places it in the context of digital immediacy and accessibility, and further changes the ‘scenery’. The post is related to the Mystery Method, following Mystery’s ruminations on how the first bootcamp/workshop went. By including a chapter such as this, Strauss is also including a self-help angle to the book, due to the content of the post being a detailed step by step account of how to have a successful interaction with women. This can still be considered in the realm of the confessional and ethnographic, due to the disclosure and authenticity, and gonzo-like quality. The post includes a stick figure drawing of a woman, with ‘negs’ written at various points of the body, that a man could use in conversation with her, for example about her hair, or her nails.
 - Chapter seven introduces Ross Jeffries and explains what his method of Speed Seduction is about. He mentions that Jeffries’ clients and followers include top government officials⁶⁵⁸ (as Strauss has subsequent to ‘The Game’ being published, himself given seminars for top secret government officials wishing to know more about persuasion techniques and eliciting values from people). Jeffries primarily uses words, in seductive patterns known as NLP to ‘hypnotize’ or persuade women, by making suggestions in their subconscious. It is a form of technology used by linguistics, therapists, seduction practitioners and even the military. Strauss references the self-help development of the 1970s and onwards to the present (mentioning Anthony Robbins), when writing of Jeffries’ background in pickup. Jeffries was the most successful seduction guru with his model

⁶⁵³ *ibid.* p. 26. “A group of women walked by and I tried to say something. But the word “hi” just barely squeaked out of my throat, not even loud enough for them to hear. As they continued past, I followed and grabbed one of the girls on the shoulder from behind. She turned around, startled, and gave me the withering what-a-creep look that was the whole reason I was too scared to talk to women in the first place.”

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 27. “To Mystery and Sin, these clubs didn’t seem to be reality. They had no problem whispering in students’ ears while they were talking to women, dropping pickup terminology in front of strangers, and even interrupting a student during a set and explaining, in front of his group, what he was doing wrong. They were so confident and their talk was so full of incomprehensible jargon that the women rarely even raised an eyebrow, let alone suspected they were being used to train wanna-be ladies’ men.”

⁶⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 29. “I furiously scribbled every word of the kiss-close in my notebook. No one had ever told me how to kiss a girl before. It was just one of those things men were supposed to know on their own, like shaving and car repair.”

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.* “Perhaps it was because attracting the opposite sex was the only area of my life in which I felt like a complete failure. Every time I walked down the street or into a bar, I saw my own failure staring me back in the face with red lipstick and black mascara. The combination of desire and paralysis was deadly.”

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 32. “Watching Mystery work, I noticed that he used the exact same openers, routines, and lines—and got a phone number or a tonguedown nearly every time, even if the woman was with a boyfriend. I’d never seen anything like it. Sometimes a woman he was talking to was even moved to tears.”

⁶⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 38. “...he commands an army sixty thousand horny men strong, including top government officials, intelligence officers, and cryptographers.” “Jeffries, who claims to be the inspiration for Tom Cruise’s character in *Magnolia*, calls it Speed Seduction.” “Jeffries developed Speed Seduction in 1988, after ending a five-year streak of sexlessness with the help of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a controversial fusion of hypnosis and psychology that emerged from the personal development boom of the 1970s and led to the rise of self-help gurus like Anthony Robbins. The fundamental precept of NLP is that one’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior—and the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of others—can be manipulated through words, suggestions, and physical gestures designed to influence the subconscious. The potential of NLP to revolutionize the art of seduction was obvious to Jeffries.”

- of pickup, prior to Mystery arriving on the scene. Through meeting Jeffries and his followers, Strauss says that he really feels like he enters a secret society. Strauss mentions more terms, such as ‘sarging’, which is going out to meet women, coined by Jeffries, in honor of his cat Sargy. He mentions ‘technology’ in conversation, with canned routines, openers, trance words, and so on. He describes wanting this ‘technology’ so as to decrease rejections, or LJBFs (Let’s Just Be Friends –speeches) from women. This student of Jeffries, Grimbale, knows other gurus also, and promises to introduce Strauss to them. He decides to have Grimbale be his ‘wing’ or wingman, that is, a person who helps you when meeting women, and the favor is then returned later, by giving ‘social proof’ to the PUA/sarger, and by telling flattering stories to women about the PUA, thus raising the PUAs ‘value’ in the woman’s eyes, through the use of such ‘DHVs’ or Display(s) of Higher Value.
- Chapter eight describes Strauss meeting Grimbale, discussing techniques that Jeffries uses in Speed Seduction. Strauss mentions that he has much to learn, and that men never discuss such things, they are reticent to discuss intimate details with one another. Otherwise, they may be seen as being homosexual.⁶⁵⁹ There are elements of homosocial behavior in this subculture, where Strauss writes on ‘warming up’ in the car before entering a bar with Grimbale, describing it as entering a new world with its own rules of behavior. This brings to mind Kimmel’s writings on homosociality of men when going out and ‘hooking up’.⁶⁶⁰ Strauss opens a woman at the bar. He watches Grimbale seduce a woman, using ‘synesthesia’, and has to ‘disarm’ the man who approaches them, who turns out to be the sarge’s (the woman’s) husband, a man who proceeds to get violent and push Strauss. The incident spurs Grimbale, as the two men walk away from the bar back to the car, to tell Strauss how to disarm, or handle, the AMOG, or Alpha Male of the Group.
 - Chapter nine is where Strauss meets Jeffries, along with Grimbale’s wing Twotimer. Jeffries is not polite, and wishes to know what Mystery taught Strauss. Strauss mentions one of his ‘sticking points’ to Jeffries, that is, where he is having trouble in the process of seducing women, and how Mystery solved that issue for him. Ross browbeats Strauss at first, and then seduces a waitress in the café they meet in, by saying Speed Seduction patterns to her⁶⁶¹, and ‘anchoring’ feeling to words he says or gestures that he does. The waitress becomes aroused, and is flushed. Strauss declares Jeffries as the real deal, too, after the waitress gives Jeffries her number. Jeffries also anchors good feelings to a sugar packet, which the waitress then places in her pocket, as a reminder of him. Darwin is mentioned in connection to the routines.⁶⁶² This chapter is the end of the section, and as all of the other chapters, is easily digestible and short. Strauss muses that although survival of the fittest in the truest sense of the word perhaps does not apply to him, it will take work to measure up to the alphas who game girls easily. Strauss does not approach any women in front of Jeffries, but watches as he and the other two assistants do so. Strauss does not get any women’s numbers, and at the end of the day, Jeffries tells him that he can sit in on a seminar for free, while pushing the idea on Strauss that Jeffries, and not Mystery, would be his PUA guru. Strauss is convinced that Jeffries is ‘anchoring’ and ‘patterning’ suggestions onto Strauss. However, Strauss wants to learn from all of the gurus, he wants all of the knowledge.⁶⁶³
 - Step three is called ‘Demonstrate Value’. It has a quotation from the female rnb/rap group ‘Salt N Peppa’.
 - Chapter one begins by likening getting girls to a predator stalking prey – slowly, quietly, and efficiently. This is related through Sin, Mystery’s protégé, who terms it the ‘Sin Method’. Sin becomes another wing for Strauss. After some time sarging with Strauss, Sin informs him that he is leaving to the Air Force, and that Mystery wants Strauss to wing him for the next workshop. Strauss is in demand, even though he is an ‘AFC’ or Average Frustrated Chump still. Strauss is surprised, but learns that Mystery is in Toronto and stagnating, does not have many friends, and his family where he is still based, is not doing so well. Strauss has a flight

⁶⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 41 and 42. “I had so much to learn. Men generally don’t communicate to one another with the same level of emotional depth and intimate detail as most women. Women discuss everything. When a man sees his friends after getting laid, they ask, “How’d it go?” And in return, he gives them either a thumbs up or a thumbs down. That’s how it’s done. To discuss the experience in detail would mean giving your friends mental images they don’t really want to have. It is a taboo among men to picture their best friends naked or having sex, because then they might find themselves aroused—and we all know what that means. So, ever since I’d first started harboring lustful thoughts in sixth grade, I’d assumed that sex was something that just happened to guys if they went out a lot and exposed themselves to chance—after all, that’s why they called it getting lucky. The only tool they had in their belt was persistence. Of course, there were some men who were sexually comfortable around women, who would tease them mercilessly until they had them eating out of their hands. But that wasn’t me. It took all of my courage to simply ask a woman for the time or where Melrose Avenue was. I didn’t know anything about [the things] Grimbale kept talking about.”

⁶⁶⁰ Kimmel, M. 2008.

⁶⁶¹ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 46. “The purpose of the question, I would find out later, was to make the waitress feel the emotion of attraction in his presence, and thus associate those feelings with his face.”

⁶⁶² *ibid.* p. 48. ““Darwin talked about survival of the fittest,” Twotimer explained to me as we walked through the museum’s collection of pre-twentieth century art. “In earlier times, this meant that the strong survived. But strength doesn’t help one get ahead in society today. Women breed with seducers, who understand how to trigger, through words and touch, the fantasy parts of the female brain.” “...”the whole idea of survival of the fittest is an anachronism. As players, we stand at the gate of a new era: the survival of the smoothest.” I liked the idea, though unfortunately I was no smoother than I was strong. My voice was fast and choppy, my movements effete, my body language awkward. For me, survival was going to take work.”

⁶⁶³ *ibid.* p. 49. ““I am going to be your guru. Not Mystery. You’ll see that what I am teaching is a hundred times more powerful.” I wasn’t sure how to respond. They were competing over me—an AFC.”

already booked to Belgrade to visit his friend Marko, and asks Mystery along, as it conflicts with the workshop dates. Mystery is persuaded to join the trip. There is a couple of paragraphs where Strauss mentions men's different reasons for getting into pickup/Game.⁶⁶⁴ Strauss views the trip as an opportunity to glean knowledge from Mystery, and to sarge Slavic women.⁶⁶⁵ This shows power relationships, leading relationships, the desire for knowledge and further experience in a fragmented society, as Giddens writes, which is ever more prevalent.⁶⁶⁶ Strauss also gains his PUA name 'Style', as Mystery says that a change is in order. Strauss picks the name himself, after a prompt ('Styles') from Mystery. Strauss reflects that he may not be socially comfortable, but is able to dress better than those who are. Mystery lists his personal development goals to Strauss⁶⁶⁷, and advises him to use the new name online, so that women will not recognize themselves in field reports posted in online communities – which can include sharing pictures, videos, audio recordings in the field, and techniques used. Strauss realizes that he still has a long way to go, a long way to change and mold his masculinity – he needs to adapt.⁶⁶⁸

- Chapter two describes how Strauss shuts himself up inside his apartment for a week and reads books and online posts, watches videos, listens to recordings, and learns all that he can about seduction and Game. He feels a pressure to live up to Mystery's faith in him, and to be the best he can be.⁶⁶⁹ He feels like he must shed Neil Strauss and become Style. This recalls Bauman and his concept of Liquid Life and individualization, which is juxtaposed with the need to belong to a collective.⁶⁷⁰ Strauss says he needs to become alpha, to be confident, decisive and graceful around women, to shed his weaknesses and insecurities⁶⁷¹, while feeling remorse for the way he was raised and not taught about man to woman relations as a boy. He buys books on persuasion, marketing, psychology, body language, flirting, sexual technique, and women's fantasies (to internalize the idea that women want sex as much as, if not more than, men). He immerses himself in related material, and his accounting of this in the book truly seems like an ethnographic telling.⁶⁷² He wishes to completely change himself, at least his behaviors socially. He also reads books and watches videos on magic, hand writing, tarot cards, and so on, to 'demonstrate value' to beautiful women, to make himself stand out from the last twenty guys approaching them, and to be able to talk about them – the idea being that everyone's favorite subject is themselves. He then works on his body language, takes salsa and swing dancing classes, studies actors considered as handsome and successful for the way they posture themselves. He works on his posture and examines every aspect of his physical movement, using the Alexander Technique, and to correct his speech, he takes private elocution and singing lessons. He buys new wardrobe items to 'peacock'. He learns new ways to socially interact, by going out every night with Jeffries and his two assistants/wings. He details some horror stories on PUAs being accosted by jealous boyfriends, which are in his mind as he goes out sarging at night and in the daytime, with a cheat sheet of lines, routines and patterns in his back pocket. At UCLA, he is 'petrified' to talk to anyone, yet he 'opens' a beautiful girl, gets her number (stating that a PUA gets a girls number, never gives her his number, as she might not call, and his job is to make her comfortable enough that she would volunteer her contact information), and she turns out to be the reigning Playmate of the

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 54. "Everyone has their own reason for getting into the game. Some, like Extramask, are virgins who want to experience what it's like to be with a woman. Others, like Grumble and Twotimer, desire new girls every night. And a few, like Sweater, are searching for the perfect wife. Mystery had his own specific goal. "I want to be loved by two women," he said. "I want a blonde 10 and an Asian 10, who will love each other as much as they love me. And Patricia's heterosexuality is affecting my sex life with her, because unless I imagine another girl there, I can't always keep my boner [...]. I'd just break up with Patricia, but there aren't any 10s in Toronto. No outrageous glitter girls. It's all 7s, at best." 55 "Move to L.A.," I urged. "This is where all the peacocks you like live."

⁶⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 55. "I couldn't wait for the six hour plane ride. I wanted to vacuum every piece of knowledge—every magic trick, every pickup line, every story—out of his head. I wanted to mimic exactly what I'd seen him do, word for word, trick for trick, simply because it worked."

⁶⁶⁶ Giddens, A. 1991.

⁶⁶⁷ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 56. "What I'm really after," he finally said, "is for people to be envious of me, for women to want me and men to want to be me."

⁶⁶⁸ *ibid.* "Yes, it was Mystery and Style giving a workshop. It had a nice ring to it. Style the pickup artist—teaching lovable losers how to meet the women of their dreams. But as soon as I hung up, I realized something: First, Style needed to teach himself. After all, it had only been a month since my workshop with Mystery. I still had a long way to go. It was time for a motherfucking change."

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid.* p. 57. "I immersed myself in seduction theory. I needed to shed Neil Strauss and rewire myself to become Style. I wanted to live up to Mystery and Sin's faith in me."

⁶⁷⁰ Bauman, Z. 2001.

⁶⁷¹ Strauss, N. p. 57. "To do so, I'd have to change not just the things I said to women, but the way I acted around them. I needed to become confident, to become interesting, to become decisive, to become graceful, to become the alpha male I was never raised to be." "I ordered books on marketing, like Robert Cialdini's seminal *Influence*, from which I learned several key principles that guide the majority of people's decisions. The most important of these is social proof, which is the notion that if everyone else is doing something, then it must be good. So if you are in a bar with a beautiful female friend on your arm (a pivot, as they call it in the community), it's much easier to meet women than if you're hanging out alone." "It wasn't enough, though, for me just to study Ross Jeffries. A lot of his ideas are simply applications of neuro-linguistic programming. So I went to the source and bought books by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the University of California professors who developed and popularized this fringe school of hypnopsychology in the 1970s."

⁶⁷² *ibid.* p. 59. "I took notes on everything I studied, developing routines and stories to test in the field. I neglected my work, my friends, and my family. I was on an eighteen-hour-a-day mission."

Year, after he Googles her name. His constant self-improvement and optimization of self is never ending, a 'liquid self' which Bauman describes as needing monitoring, and to remain current.

- Chapter three describes how Strauss does not call Dalene Kurtis' number, as he does not want to spoil the sense of accomplishment he has by getting her number. He does not feel good enough for her 'perfect' femininity.⁶⁷³ Lack of self-esteem shows here, echoing what Kimmel and Bauman say. The self feels pressured to live up to an ideal of masculinity that is demanded by men and women. He is his own worst enemy. The student from Mystery's workshop, Extramask, pays a visit to Strauss' apartment in Santa Monica. He holds a copy of self-help guru Anthony Robbins' book. Strauss says that they are on the same path. A funny conversation about pissing is recounted, the point being that Mystery's material is useful not just for meeting girls, but for overall social confidence. Strauss approaches a woman, and is worried about looking like an AFC in front of Extramask. He cold reads her, mentioning that it is taken from a book that exposes the shams that psychics use to tell people truisms about themselves.⁶⁷⁴ Strauss meets the woman for a date later, and uses the opportunity to practice more advanced material on her. This works with the woman, similar to Jeffries and the waitress. Strauss is candid about her responsiveness, and even uses phrases such as 'To be honest...' in the description. Strauss feels uncomfortable using some of the material, and states that he wants to be in the Game to gain confidence, not mind control. Strauss drives the woman to her hotel, goes to her room, but does not have sex with her – he mentions her feet which smell, and he has to get out of there. It was 'not solid game' anyway, as it happened in under seven hours, which is the usual time it takes to lead a woman from meet to sex.⁶⁷⁵
- Chapter four is a 'field report'⁶⁷⁶ posted by Extramask in the MSN group Mystery's Lounge, which details his successful pick up and 'f-close', that is, having sex, with a woman. The group and homosocial nature of the community is in play here, where there is approval sought with telling the events of the night, not only constructive criticism. The openness of the post is striking, as are the explicit details of the sex he has with the woman. Extramask, previously a virgin until this night, is unimpressed with sex, and cannot orgasm or 'finish'. He tries different positions 'like in the porno movies!'. He is bored throughout most of the experience. He does not want to leave quickly when the woman suggests it, after the sex has wound down. He wants to leave on his terms. This shows the power dynamic, and fear of emasculation and loss of power in social dynamics in post modernity, as described by Foucault and by Giddens.
- Chapter five details how difficult it is to kiss a girl, being so close physically yet so far away in terms of bridging the gap. The deflection of everything a man is, his 'birthright' as Strauss says, can be crushing.⁶⁷⁷ Strauss mentions going out every night, in order to train for Mystery's workshop. Rejection, he says, is not an option. He works incessantly at improving his Game. This shows how difficult social interaction can be, if one wants to get better at it, and get better at meeting women, who have constructed social barriers and mazes which men must circumnavigate in order to get closer to them sexually or emotionally. Strauss says that there are only learning lessons, not failure, yet he wants the failure to take place in his head, so that in the field he is flawless. His lack of escalation with women is put down to no one telling him what to do after rapport is established, and also, that he is still being too much of an AFC, a 'nice guy', sacred to kiss her and risk breaking the 'trust' that a woman gives him when she talks and spends some time with him.⁶⁷⁸
- Chapter six details the trip to Belgrade that Strauss and Mystery take. Mystery advises Strauss to get a makeover, to shave his head, contour his facial hair, get a tan, and get laser eye surgery to rid himself of his glasses, and to join a gym.⁶⁷⁹ The body idealization related to alpha masculinity appears here, that Kimmel⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷³ *ibid.* p. 63. "I felt unworthy." "I was just some weird, interesting guy she had met in an office-supply store. There was no reason this woman, who could have her choice of any man in the hemisphere, would want to see me again. So I never called. I was my own worst enemy."

⁶⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 64. "I realized, was a lot like stand-up comedy or any other performing art. They each require openers, routines, and a memorable close, plus the ability to make it all seem new every time."

⁶⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 66. "Waiting seven hours or more is what Mystery calls solid game. But occasionally a woman either goes out with the specific intention of taking someone home, or can be easily led to sex in a shorter amount of time. Mystery calls this fool's mate. I had spent an hour with this girl at La Salsa and two hours at the bar. I was about to experience my first fool's mate."

⁶⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 67. "Every night after outings and dates, seduction students and masters post online breakdowns of their experiences, called field reports. The goals in chronicling their adventures vary: Some want help with mistakes, others want to share new techniques, and a few just want to brag."

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.* p. 74. "It is the moment when the male must concede all the privileges that are his birthright; put his pride, ego, esteem, and hard work aside; and just hope – hope that she doesn't deflect it with her cheek or, even worse, the let's-just-be-friends speech." "Every time I went home, I reviewed the events of the night, looking for parts of a sarge that I could have done better. If the approach didn't work, I thought of ways to improve it—angles of advance, backturns, takeaways, time constraints. If I didn't get the phone number, I didn't blame it on the girl for being cold or bitchy, as so many other sargers did. I blamed myself and analyzed every word, gesture, and reaction until I pinpointed a tactical error."

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 75. "Unless she gave me a clear indication that she was sexually interested in me, I felt like trying to kiss her would disappoint her and she'd think I was just like all the other guys. It was such stupid AFC thinking. There was still a nice guy lurking in my head that I had to get rid of."

⁶⁷⁹ *ibid.* p. 76. ""You're doing well because you're smart and you're a fast learner. But looks count too. You're Style, so start being Style. Just snap: shave your head, get Lasik, join a gym.""

⁶⁸⁰ Kimmel, M. 1987 and 2004.

- and Giddens⁶⁸¹ and Franklin⁶⁸² write about. Strauss gets his head shaved and goes to a tanning salon, and likes the new look, wondering what took him so long to change. Looks are shown to matter, at least to a degree. Being well groomed is important. His friend Marko, at whose place they are staying, pulls Strauss aside and complains that Mystery is 'superficial', and reminds Strauss of the college that the both attended together. Strauss retorts that Mystery will change Marko's life. Marko is fixated on a girl, who he has taken to dinner and events, and has not kissed yet. Strauss mentions that he is behaving like an AFC and has 'oneitis'.
- Chapter seven breaks with conventions again, by detailing the contents of Strauss' 'prop bag' which contains items for a successful sarge such as cards, pen and paper, photos, condoms, gum, and so on. He also has illustrations and explanations of how to physically approach a woman at a bar, from what angle and how to claim her seat, so that it looks like she is talking to you, and not the other way around. This makes women in the club notice the PUA's 'social proof' and 'preselection' by other women, making it easy to 'open' and approach them later, as they will be subconsciously more attracted and receptive. Strauss' first night of the workshop at a lounge bar in Belgrade is described. The students are mostly from other countries, due to the high price Mystery is charging. The economic element of this, along with looks, though played down by the community, shows that in order to maintain a certain lifestyle, looks, money and connections are useful, if not important. How strangers immediately size one another up is discussed.⁶⁸³ How they open sets, or groups of people, is discussed. The men's masculinity is evaluated and determined, through spoken and unspoken signifiers. Feedback is given by Strauss and Mystery to the students who are sarging. This men helping men to be their best selves, while also critiquing them.⁶⁸⁴ Approach anxiety is also described, illustrating how difficult talking to strangers, and attracting women, can be. Strauss also mentions where this fear comes from, and why it is always in men's minds and bodies, including the drive that men have, to sleep with women, despite the often overwhelming fear and thoughts that this produces for them internally. Strauss, though still not an accomplished PUA himself, is now a teacher of Game, alongside Mystery. He executes a perfect approach in the bar with two women, like a good game of chess. After he gets his target's number, in front of Mystery and the students – and their approval – he declares himself, as Style, the real deal. He also claims that by socializing these students, he and Mystery were reducing violent crime, which is often the result of frustrated sexual impulses. Strauss mentions a downside, as he realizes he is viewing women as measuring sticks on his progress as a pickup artist. He describes a gulf between the sexes⁶⁸⁵, and impersonal and objectifying view which actually makes him more successful with women. In the next club, Mystery approaches an "impossible set" with eight military-looking men and one woman, and gets the woman's phone number. He gains the admiration of the men, and the bouncers and club manager, and Strauss and the students. He disarms the AMOG who challenges him. This is successful masculinity, the alpha, in action, and claiming the rewards. Mystery 'pawns' the entire club, to meet the girl, who he then isolates and gets the number.
 - Chapter eight describes the girl that Marko is "seeing", who he describes as "different". However, Strauss gets her into bed, or rather, she climbs into Strauss' bed, after being so impressed by his sociability in the restaurant where the four of them (Strauss, Mystery, Marko and the girl) have dinner. Nothing happens, as he feels guilt over hurting his friend like this. She had also made a pass at Mystery earlier, who pretended not to notice. The girl declares Marko as just a friend, though the pair have been "dating" for months. The Game is proven in the text to work on all girls, even ones that men or women say it will not work on. Power, agency and persuasion

⁶⁸¹ Giddens, A. 1991.

⁶⁸² Franklin, C. W. 1984.

⁶⁸³ *ibid.* p. 82. "This time, it was my turn to go around the table and ask, "What's your score?" and "What are your sticking points?" and "How many girls would you like to sleep with?" "One by one, they placed their fears, and their voice recorders, on the table. My job was to get them into the game. I needed to get what was in my head into theirs."

⁶⁸⁴ *ibid.* p. 83. "Like many guys, he didn't communicate with energy. All those years of insecurity and social ostracism had chased his spirit and joy of life deep within his body. Whenever he opened his mouth, there was no need for anyone to strain to make out his faint mumblings. The message was clear: "I was built to be ignored." "Fear seizes hold in your chest first. It clamps gently to the top of the heart, like a vice made of rubber. Then you really feel it. Your stomach churns. Your throat closes. And you swallow, desperately trying to avoid the dryness and hoping that when you open your mouth, a confident, clear voice will emerge. Even after all my training, I was terrified." "...a great pickup artist must either be congruent with his material—and really believe it—or be a great actor. Anyone talking to a woman while simultaneously worrying about what she thinks of him is going to fail. Anyone caught thinking about getting into a woman's pants before she starts thinking about what's in his pants is going to fail. And most men fall into this category [...] We can't help it: It's our nature. Mystery calls it dynamic social homeostasis. We are constantly buffeted about by, on one hand, our overwhelming desire to have sex with a girl and, on the other, the need to protect ourselves when approaching. The reason this fear exists, he says, is because we are wired evolutionarily for a tribal existence, where everyone in the community knows when a man is rejected by a woman. He is then ostracized and his genes, as Mystery puts it, are unapologetically weeded out of existence."

⁶⁸⁵ *ibid.* p. 87. "It was then that I realized the downside to this whole venture. A gulf was opening between men and women in my mind. I was beginning to see women solely as measuring instruments to give me feedback on how I was progressing as a pickup artist. They were my crash-test dummies, identifiable only by hair colors and numbers—a blonde 7, a brunette 10. Even when I was having a deep conversation, learning about a woman's dreams and point of view, in my mind I was just ticking off a box in my routine marked rapport. In bonding with men, I was developing an unhealthy attitude toward the opposite sex. And the most troubling thing about this new mindset was that it seemed to be making me more successful with women."

are themes in this chapter, so too, can one see the hegemonic dominance of the west, to people from poorer countries who may idolize “westerners”, if not forthrightly, at least privately.⁶⁸⁶ The legitimacy and attractiveness of the alpha male, and functionality of Game, is established. The interaction between writer and audience is taken further, when Strauss asks readers to email him with theories as to what Marko does in his hour-long showers.⁶⁸⁷ This is a form of multimodality which Kress speaks⁶⁸⁸ of, transgressing the written pages, into electronic communication directly. A fight ensues between Marko and the girl, and the chapter ends with Marko declaring that he wants to take Mystery’s next workshop.

- Chapter nine continues the story of Strauss’ number-close girl from the last club. He is on a date with her. He is scared to kiss her.⁶⁸⁹ The need to prove masculinity is pervasive in the text, not as some juvenile attempt that Kimmel portrays it to be, but a serious and deep-seated need, with roots in society’s expectations, and women’s expectations, coupled with matching up to other men. Strauss is scared of rejection and feeling uncomfortable afterwards, and discloses this in the text. He calls himself an approach machine, but he is still afraid of sexual rejection. He is not successful with his date. Mystery is successful with the girl from the previous bar. Strauss mentions that sexual choice is an area of life where women indisputably hold all of the power.⁶⁹⁰ To inspire women to say yes, Strauss says that he will have to grow some balls and leave his comfort zone, comparing it to the pain period when learning a new skill, such as body building, facing rejection, humiliation and heartache head on. To get a woman, you have to risk losing her, he writes. This gets into philosophical and quasi-Zen territory, yet it is true concerning social dynamics. The chapter ends with Marko feeling hurt by his girl’s behavior, deciding to go to Moldova, and Mystery and Strauss joining him, on adventures that Strauss had always dreamed about.
- Chapter nine details the drive to Moldova, with the three men. Mystery has a fever. There are border control dramas. They drive on to the Ukrainian border and Odessa. The text becomes a buddy story and road trip at this point, told humorously and engagingly, such as when he remarks to readers not to worry if they had not heard of a country, neither had he or the other two men.⁶⁹¹ This shows the transgressive nature of the text, and the multimodality incorporated.⁶⁹² Strauss criticizes Mystery and details a fight in the car at a border that they have, during a tense situation. This indicates that there is not a blind adulation of either Mystery nor of Game, as Strauss does highlight the ‘dark side’ of becoming obsessed with getting better at anything, and with wanting to be the best in a hypercompetitive liquid modernity.⁶⁹³ Mystery’s family life and relationship with his father is discussed. Mystery formulates the Mystery Method in a bout of depression at not feeling love from his parents, and worried he might be gay, a virgin at twenty one, and needing love. The power of female attention, and the necessity to feel a solid masculinity in society, are strikingly evident here. The group reaches Odessa, then returns to Belgrade. Mystery’s girl calls Marko incessantly, asking for Mystery. Marko emails Strauss asking for the password to Mystery Lounge, which Strauss does not give in an effort to keep his past separate from his present, yet he admits it may have been due to embarrassment of what he is doing and how it is consuming his life.
- Chapter eleven is an MSN group Mystery Lounge online internet post by Style, on a sticking point that he has, which is kiss-closing. This post is answered by other PUA members of the online group. Mystery’s advice is to ‘go Caveman’, which is to be uninhibited and ultra-alpha, assured and not afraid of rejection.⁶⁹⁴ The premise is that women like authority and that they want to be led. Style announces that he is ready for the next step, after

⁶⁸⁶ *ibid.* p. 90. “I’d heard it all before from dozens of guys. And I’d heard just as many intelligent women say, “That wouldn’t work on me,” when I told them about the community. Yet minutes or hours later, I’d see them exchanging phone numbers—or saliva—with one of the boys. The smarter a girl is, the better it works. Party girls with attention deficit disorder generally don’t stick around to hear the routines. A more perceptive, worldly, or educated girl will listen and think, and soon find herself ensnared.”

⁶⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 91. “One of Marko’s more peculiar habits is that he takes hour-long showers every night. No one has ever come up with a plausible explanation of what he does in there, because nothing makes sense—masturbating, for example, doesn’t take that long. If you have any theories, please send them to: ManOfStyle@gmail.com.”

⁶⁸⁸ Kress, G. 2003.

⁶⁸⁹ *ibid.* p. 93. “The great Style, the apprentice PUA whose magnetism was so strong that it made Marko look like an AFC to his own true love, was still too scared to kiss a girl.” “I had great opening game, but no follow through. I should have taken care of the problem before Belgrade. But it was too late. I was blowing it. I was scared of rejection, and of feeling uncomfortable afterward.”

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid.* “It’s not until they’ve made a choice, and submitted to it, that the relationship is inverted—and the man is generally back in a position of power over her. Perhaps that is why women, to the frustration of men everywhere, are so cautious about saying yes.”

⁶⁹¹ *ibid.* p. 98. “With pride, the guard answered back, “Pridnestrovskaja.” If you’ve never have heard of Pridnestrovskaja (or Trans-Dniester, in English), don’t worry: neither had we. Trans-Dniester is neither recognized diplomatically nor mentioned in any of the guide books or maps we carried. 99 But when there’s a border guard pressing a pistol into your waist, well, suddenly Pridnestrovskaja seems very real”

⁶⁹² Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. 2001.

⁶⁹³ Bauman, Z. 1991.

⁶⁹⁴ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 104. “Look back to girls you didn’t caveman, and they aren’t in your life. So fucking what? Do you care that she has a fond memory of some guy she met six months ago while a caveman is now fucking her?”

this advice, and after detailing a date that he has. He calls his solution the 'evolution phase-shift routine'. Self-help, and the willingness to be a part of a community, helping each other, can be seen from this chapter. Strauss gets a kiss from an Irish girl, and brings her back to his place. They do not have sex, but he finally 'sees the Matrix'.

- The next section, Step Four, is titled 'Disarm the Obstacles'.
- Chapter one begins with a comparison of the schools of seduction that Strauss has studied (and met with) so far. He is comparing products, mentors and pickup styles, which reminds us of the globalized, capitalist, hypermaterialistic setting of western democratic postmodernity. This list includes 'inner circle' teachers, who only show their skills to those people whom they deem worthy. Loyalty to one method or teacher, is sought after, yet in this information saturated and fragmented society, people want all of the information, all of the skills, and all of the power, immediately.⁶⁹⁵ Strauss is not immune to this, and says his goal is to learn from all of the gurus and methods. The hypercompetitive nature of late capitalism is evident, with gurus trying to best one another. Strauss does not want followers, he wants more teachers, as he still has a lot to learn. He goes to a party in a hotel with Extramask. He spots the Porcelain TwinZ there, a pair of twin burlesque dancers. 'The Game' shows us society's fascination with celebrity, semi-celebrity and pseudo-celebrity, through the lens of what is possible for an 'average' man if he gains impressive skills with Game. Also, it demonstrates how far away and yet how close anyone can potentially be from a celebrity, or from gaining celebrity status themselves. This recalls Giddens' comments on reflexive modernity.⁶⁹⁶ Strauss/Style asks Extramask to introduce him to the girls, even though Extramask does not know them. He performs socially, and gains the twins' interest. Strauss simultaneously criticizes aspects⁶⁹⁷ of Game, while utilizing them in his social repertoire and being successful, in a seemingly paradoxical stance. However, this could be due to his wanting to 'critic proof' his books, as he tries to see the text from all angles, and make it robust to most criticism. Strauss does not know whether to go for one twin, or both. So he leaves the situation. Strauss feels powerful, with his new ability to easily kiss women, and makes out with a girl in the bathrooms. Strauss loses the twins, and berates himself over not pushing himself further, and instead being too complacent. Again, this shows the hypercompetitiveness evident in society in postmodernity. Strauss gets a message from the girls, who are staying an extra day in town. He invites himself to their hotel. He rehearses every move in his head on the drive over there. He repeats for a third time in the text, that it is not lying, it is flirting, when he tells the girls that he needs to take a bath because the hot water in his home is not working. There are themes of trust here also: trust in himself, trust in the techniques of the Game, and trust in Mystery's advice given prior to the trip to the hotel. In the constant strive for perfection, to live up to female desire and societal standards of beauty and Darwinian benchmarks, Strauss looks at himself in the bathtub while he works up the courage to call the girls into the room, and hates his body, telling himself that he needs to work out.⁶⁹⁸ He feels vulnerable. The gonzo-like authenticity to this 'scene' is noteworthy. Strauss waits a long time to call them in, the immediately criticizes himself when he does, wondering if he said it the wrong way, and fearful and panicked that the girls will ignore him. He writes that if he can quote James Joyce, then he need not feel so stupid in front of the girls. One of the girls goes to the room, and Strauss feels less stupid, but still very shy, and critical of his own body. He hopes that she is not grossed out by his body. She cleans his back. Strauss mentions that he does not know what is supposed to happen next, as he thought that sex is just 'supposed to happen'. He still needs to learn more Game⁶⁹⁹. The moment is illustrative of how complicated social and seductive interaction can be, and the puzzlement over why it is not taught by friends, family or school. Clearly, many people do not know how to interact, especially men, this is confusing and painful, and attests to the importance of Game and seduction companies as a resource for these men. Strauss presses on with the girls, determined not to leave as "a failure". The pressure of expectations, desires and of living up to ideals, is ever present.⁷⁰⁰ Strauss discusses how he is

⁶⁹⁵ *ibid.* p. 109. "My goal was to feed from all of them. I've never been a true believer in anything. I've preferred to combine teaching and wisdom from various sources, find what applies to me, and discard what doesn't. The problem is that when you drink from the source of knowledge, there is a price. And that price is faith. Every single teacher wanted to know that he was the best, that his students were the most loyal, that the competition wasn't getting laid. Yet every single student wanted to absorb as much information from as many different experts as possible. It is a crisis that's specific not to the community but to humanity: Power is retained by attracting loyalty, and subjugation is guaranteed by giving it."

⁶⁹⁶ Beck, U., Giddens, A. and Lash, S. 1994.

⁶⁹⁷ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 111. "We sat down together and made small talk, which the PUAs refer to somewhat disparagingly as fluffing." "Most men make the mistake of believing that an attractive woman who doesn't talk to or acknowledge him is a bitch. Most of the time, however, she's just as shy or insecure as the less attractive women he's ignoring—if not more so."

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 112. "So I sat naked in the bathwater, trying to work up the courage to call the girls in. I felt so vulnerable sitting there pale, skinny, and naked. I needed to take Mystery's advice and start working out."

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 113. "I thought sex was supposed to automatically happen afterward. But she was just kneeling there, doing nothing. Mystery hadn't told me what I was supposed to do after asking them to wash my back. He'd just said take it from there, so I assumed the whole sex thing would unfold organically. He hadn't told me how to transition from a back scrub to a hand job. And I had no idea."

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.* "I left their hotel room, a failure."

having to fight for every morsel of new seductive power, it is incredibly hard work. He wants to not wait, and make the good things come to him. Strauss takes Mystery's advice, and changes his appearance even further.⁷⁰¹ He works to gain a mastery over himself, to transform into his authentic self, to truly tap into his potential for best self and masculinity, to become an alpha. Strauss aims to meet every top PUA guru there is, before Mystery's next workshop, to transform himself into a seducing machine comprised of all the best pieces from all of the best PUAs. His status in the community as Mystery's new wing will help to facilitate meeting these people.

- Chapter two is a field report, written by Juggler. This is another deviation in the book, as this chapter is written by a different author.⁷⁰² He is a PUA who recounts how he meets 'Style', and the workshop of his that Style attends. The reader is kept engaged and the mode is consistently refreshed in the text, by Strauss playing with the format of the longform book, and the multimodalities therein. The chapter turns a different lens onto both pickup and the author himself, as it is mostly about Strauss/Style as described by 'Juggler'. The chapter is balanced, and gives an air of authenticity, as it has positive and potentially critical things to say about Strauss, in the context of their first meeting, and sarging together. It also describes Juggler's take on Game. Including this in the book is artistically brave and exciting. There is also commentary on modernity's lack of focus and wanting of stimulation and immediate gratification. Style gets the girl (her number), in front of Juggler. The scariness of girls to men is mentioned, and the potential they have for hurting and ruining a man in so many ways. This underlines the pressure men are under for most of their lives, something brought to the fore by pickup discussion – and the benefits of self-improvement, with the optimism of Strauss in them. There is a thread/cliffhanger at the end of every chapter, always alluding to a bigger picture. This chapter contains one where answers are suggested as lying elsewhere, though there is much fun to be had in the process they are pursuing. This might be more evidence of Strauss critic-proofing his work, recalling the endless self-reflexivity of liquid modernity.
- Chapter three concerns a workshop Strauss has with Jeffries. Jeffries is competing with Mystery for Strauss as his protégé. Students at the workshop include Justice Officials, businessmen and government men.⁷⁰³ Masculinity display and competition between men is evinced, in Jeffries' publically "claiming" Style as "his disciple". Strauss, not to be rude in public, meekly agrees, although vaguely. Jeffries presses him and Strauss keeps his independence, answering that he will get back to him on that. Strauss likens Jeffries' seminar to a cult.⁷⁰⁴ The rivalry between gurus is shown in Jeffries' reactions, especially. Strauss does not think the methods have to be mutually exclusive. Jeffries' is protective, as being the founder of the entire seduction community (as Speed Seduction was invented, so was the internet made publically accessible, and the alt.seduction.net newsgroup, attracting PUAs internationally), he feels the need to protect his territory, and to protect the power and control that he gained through learning NLP. David DeAngelo's history is explained, his company Double Your Dating, his principle of cocky/funny, and evolutionary theory-based material. Strauss writes that he notes to sign up for DeAngelo's seminar. Jeffries seduces a lunch table of women. Strauss says Jeffries' paranoia makes sense, in that there are other powerful methods and teachers out there, such as Mystery.
- Chapter four is short, and recounts a conversation with Sinn, who says that Jeffries is a "plotter". The gossip-type nature of men's relations is revealed here, as are insecurities and reflexivity. The weight of self-monitoring is burdensome and potentially crippling, holding back potential progress.⁷⁰⁵ Jeffries is invited by Strauss to a party with actresses such as Carmen Elektra, and he embarrasses Strauss, by not behaving well or being able to handle classy people. Strauss bemoans the fact that his old friends have fallen to the wayside, and his standard of friends is now lower, as they are all nerds who are into pickup. He wants to be around women,

⁷⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 114. "I got Lasik surgery, shedding my nerdy glasses once and for all. I paid to get my teeth laser-whitened. And I joined a gym and took up surfing, which was not only a cardiovascular workout but also a way to get tan. In some respects, surfing reminded me of sarging. Some days you go out and catch every wave and think you're a champ; other days you don't get one good wave and you think you suck. But no matter what, every day you go out and you learn and you improve. And that's what keeps you coming back. However, I hadn't joined the community just to get a makeover. I needed to complete my mental transformation, which I knew would be much more difficult. Before Belgrade, I had taught myself the words, skills, and body language of a man of charisma and quality. Now I needed to develop the confidence, self-worth, and inner game to back it up. Otherwise, I'd just be a fake, and women would sense it instantly." "I planned to make myself a seducing machine, designed from pieces of all the best PUAs."

⁷⁰² *ibid.* p. 115. "So when I called Juggler to discuss using a field report of his in the book, he asked if he could write something new instead: the story of the day he sarged me at his first workshop in San Francisco."

⁷⁰³ *ibid.* p. 122. "[a few of the students were] top-ranking officials at Fortune 500 companies and even the Justice Department."

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 123. "I could see that he wasn't happy with my response. After all, this wasn't just a seminar he was running. It was a cult."

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid.* p. 128. "There was a catch to learning NLP, manipulation, and self-improvement. No action—whether yours or another's—was devoid of intent. Every word had a hidden meaning, and every hidden meaning had weight, and every weight had its own special place on the scale of self-interest."

- but finds himself hanging out with men a lot, in a homosocial milieu.⁷⁰⁶ Strauss does not tell Jeffries that he will attend DeAngelo's seminar the next day.
- Chapter five talks about DeAngelo's seminar, and his motto of 'Attraction is not a choice'. The subculture of pickup artist students is described.⁷⁰⁷ DeAngelo stands out due to be organized, rather than having entertaining or flashy Game. His seminar is a well-prepared product, ready for mass consumption. DeAngelo says that he teaches Attraction, which he differentiates from 'seduction', as that word has some negative connotations.⁷⁰⁸ From a marketing and business point of view, DeAngelo wants to bring the pickup community to the mainstream, to lonely men who yearn to 'cross the invisible barrier separating two strangers at a club' and not acknowledge individual gurus as such, while explaining the concepts in safe and acceptable language. He initially uses instant messaging on AOL to practice Game, before studying under Jeffries and branching off by himself, collecting knowledge from various sources and gurus. Strauss mentions DeAngelo writing in Cliff's List, another of the first online pickup communities, run by Cliff, who collects PUAs to bring into and teach the community. Strauss meets DeAngelo's PUA friend Rick H. Strauss tells an anecdote of a botched set he did, showing that he is not afraid to disclose embarrassing stories about himself. He and Extramask discuss how to unhook bras.
 - Chapter six is a post on MSN Group Mystery's Lounge by Zan Perrion on cocky/funny technique. Although Strauss has said it is not a self-help book, the stories in the book are usually very illuminating and explanatory as to what Game comprises.
 - Chapter seven recounts Strauss meeting Steve P and Rasputin, who teach sexual technique, and self-hypnosis technique, and help Strauss with his 'inner Game' exponentially. They appear at the DeAngelo seminar and give talks.⁷⁰⁹ Their advice is to become an expert in how to feel good. To describe students and others, Strauss often uses figures from popular culture, such as Clarke Kent or Indiana Jones. These often become nicknames, for brevity, similar to how field reports are writing in the online seduction communities, naming women HB 8 (the numerical being her level of attractiveness from one to ten), so that one student is called in the text 'Mini-Clark Kent. The informality of the text gives it an immediacy and familiarity. Strauss asks to learn more from the two men – their inner-circle, 'classified' information and knowledge, with powerful hypnosis techniques.
 - Chapter eight describes Strauss' lessons when visiting Steve P and Rasputin, undergoing deep hypnosis sessions to rid him of anxieties, inadequacies, limiting beliefs and energies. He strives to be a perfect man, an alpha.⁷¹⁰ The PUAs reframe Strauss' subconscious where being with a woman will be a privilege for her, rather than he being glad that she is with him. Strauss tells his 'theory' on why men go to learn from the seduction community – a result of ostracization from sex and women, whom they feel alienated from and intimidated by, if they did not have enough contact with them intimately as adolescents. Strauss learns many sexual techniques from the men, many of which are quasi-spiritual and mystic. Strauss considers these super powers. He does not call friends or family, being in a 'whirlwind' of learning. The constant updating of liquid life is seen here. They offer him a teaching position, he declines, as to go through one door will mean foregoing others which are opening all around him – the seduction world being a 'palace of open doors'.
 - Chapter nine discusses Strauss' meeting with Cliff of Cliff's List, and David X. Strauss addresses misogyny in throw away lines here and there, for example, when recounting the title of a book.⁷¹¹ David X's specialty is

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid.* p. 129. "Since I'd started spending so much time with PUAs, I'd lowered my standards for people I hung out with. All my old friends had fallen by the wayside. Now my social life was monopolized by a caliber of nerd I'd never associated with before. I was in the game to have more women in my life, not men. And though the community was all about women, it was also completely devoid of them. Hopefully, this was just part of the process, the way cleaning a house often makes it messier first."

⁷⁰⁷ *ibid.* p. 130. "It was getting to be an all-too-familiar sight: a person onstage with a headset instructing a group of needy men on how to save themselves from nightly onanism." "[DeAngelo's method] was a school of pickup instruction that could be presented to the mainstream without shocking anyone with its crudeness, its attitude toward women, or the deviousness of its techniques—except, that is, for his recommendation of reading the book *Dog Training* by Lew Burke for tips on handling girls."

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.* p. 131. "'Attraction is working on yourself and improving yourself to the point where women are magnetically attracted to you and want to be around you.'" "He wasn't a genius or an innovator like Mystery and Ross. But he was a great marketer."

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 139. "The two had met in a bookstore while both reaching for the same NLP book. Now they worked as a team and were among the most powerful hypnotists in the world."

⁷¹⁰ *ibid.* 142. "They'd sit me in a chair and ask what I wanted to learn. I had a list: to believe that I was attractive to women; to live in my own reality; to stop worrying about what other people thought of me; to move and speak with an air of strength, confidence, mystery, and depth; to get over my fear of sexual rejection; and, of course, to attain a sense of worthiness, which Rasputin defined as the belief that one deserves the best the world has to offer." "I have a theory that most naturals [...] lose their virginity at a young age and consequently never feel a sense of urgency, curiosity, and intimidation around women during their critical pubescent years. Those who must learn to meet women methodically, on the other hand—like myself and most students in the community—generally suffer through high school without girlfriends or even dates. Thus, we're forced to spend years feeling intimidated by and alienated from women, who hold in their sole possession the key to releasing us from the stigma blighting our young adult lives: our virginity."

⁷¹¹ *ibid.* p. 145. "[when discussing some magazine and books that Cliff owns] ...and misogynist obscurities with titles like *Seduction Begins When the Woman Says No*."

juggling multiple relationships with women without lying to them. He describes David X (as he does other PUAs to an extent) as extremely unattractive, balding and fat. Strauss notes that the techniques and rules with different gurus are always different. He terms David X a ‘natural alpha male’, evidence of Cliff’s ‘Big Mouth’ theory. Strauss realizes he does not need to meet any more gurus to learn other pieces of Game. He needs to consolidate and amalgamate all that he has learned, synthesize it, and become a PUA ‘for real’. He has all the information he needs to become the greatest pickup artist in the world. He will be an equal to all the other gurus, he promises himself.⁷¹² His next stage on the way to becoming a “hero” has been completed.

- Step five is titled ‘Isolate the Target’.
- Chapter one is more advanced in the story itself: Strauss and Mystery are travelling the world, giving seminars and bootcamps, they are “superstars” in the pickup world, successful masculine alphas, sleeping with hundreds of women, proving their worth in the field, demonstrating their techniques in front of students. The community itself develops quickly, with stars rising, fakes and ‘keyboard jockeys’ being outed. No exact dates or time frames are given. The screen names become a reality – Strauss describes some of these PUAs. Lairs spring up in each city they leave, if one did not exist there already. The men worship Style and Mystery. They see the pair as living the life that they want to live. Online reviews praise the workshops. The game consumes his life, but Strauss says it is worth it to become the guy that he envied in the club all of his life. He mentions his ‘natural’ friend, Dustin, throughout the book, at various points, as a shorthand to how effortless he wishes to become with women. He admits that none of the men were above shallow validation-seeking, despite all of the self-help material they have read.
- Chapter two details a sarge that Strauss performs successfully, which he claims heralds his change from AFC to PUA. He claims that it is ‘the perfect sarge’. Initially he has to suppress all his evolutionary instincts and ignore them. He ‘negs’ them, and in a high pressure moment, he avoids being ‘branded another weirdo’, by gaining their attention. He proves that looks do not matter, and initially is wearing a ridiculous wig and a fake lip piercing.⁷¹³ The girls give him many “shit tests” which he passes. Strauss breaks through “their programming” and “auto-pilot responses” that they give to men. The author plays up his lines, describing them as “beautiful”. It is easy to notice that he is proud of his “work”. Still, he does not get it perfectly done, as there is so much to remember during a sarge. Strauss addresses the reader again, mentioning that it might be noticeable that he does not tell his or the girls’ names, due to it being initially unimportant in a social interaction. He waits for the woman to ask for his name, which is an IOI, or ‘Indicator of Interest’. The practice of PUAs never buying drinks or meals for girls, especially if they have not slept with them, is revealed, and that “dating is for tools”.⁷¹⁴ Strauss writes that the rules of the game are to be followed, because they work. After he kisses the target girl, women start to open him for the rest of the night, they can “smell” his success. The author writes that it is the Game artfully played, and his not getting laid does not matter. He counters this somewhat, by saying that it is creating a hunger that may never be satiated.
- Chapter three concerns a break in Los Angeles that Strauss has, following two months of workshops. The compulsion to sarge overwhelms him. Strauss tries to sarge Hollywood madam Heidi Fleiss, who wants to meet him. She wishes to see Style in action. Grumble announces that he will be on a dating show on TV, and will show off his seduction skills. Fleiss and Strauss begin to sarge the bar, to see who gets the most/best girls. Strauss notices her pickup skills. He gives the set they are running, some “chick crack”, which is routines involving tests, psychological games, fortune-telling, and cold-reading. Girls like these subjects similarly to how addicts like drugs, according to the community. Strauss learns that there is a fine line between “pimp and player”, again perhaps acquiescing to possible feminist criticism, although on the surface in the context of Fleiss.
- Chapter four describes Grumble’s appearance on the TV dating show, important to the community, Strauss says dramatically, in that it might show that Game has an advantage over the “jocks” that nerds have competed against all of their lives.⁷¹⁵ Grumble wins the date on the show, validating the pickup community, though it is not stated whether he says on air if he is affiliated with them. It is doubtful however, as they still wish to remain underground and anonymous as a community, due to society not being able to adequately comprehend or contextualize PUAs. Strauss reflects that he does not have oneitis for any woman. The less he loves them, the more successful he becomes with them. He terms this “seducer’s paradox”. Every woman he meets seems

⁷¹² *ibid.* p. 146. “I had hundreds of openers, routines, cocky funny comments, ways to demonstrate value, and powerful sexual techniques. And I’d been hypnotized to Valhalla and back. It wasn’t necessary to learn anything else, unless it was for my own fun and interest. I just needed to be in the field constantly—approaching, calibrating, fine-tuning, and working through sticking points. I was ready for Miami, and all the workshops to follow. As Cliff drove me home, I made a promise to myself: If I ever met a guru again, it would be not as a student but as an equal.”

⁷¹³ *ibid.* p. 152. “Everything I say in a pickup has an ulterior motive. I needed to let her know that unlike every other guy in the bar, I am not and will not be intimidated by her looks. Beauty to me was now a shit test: It weeded out the losers who got dumbstruck by it.”

⁷¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 154. “I’m not really that arrogant, but in the game there are rules. And the rules must be obeyed, because they work.”

⁷¹⁵ *ibid.* 161. “Our entire lifestyle was at stake. If he won, it would prove that the community really did have a social edge over the jocks and studs we’d felt inferior to all our lives. If he lost, then we were just self-delusional keyboard jockeys. The fate of PUAs everywhere was in his hands.”

disposable and replaceable. Bars and clubs are different levels on a video game that he has to get through. With a girl from the previous night getting closer to Strauss after her strip/burlesque show, the comedian Andy Dick walks into the room and destroys the pickup, as one of his friends knows the girl. Celebrity, power and success are shown to be disruptive forces. Strauss says this happens a lot in LA, it happened to him in his AFC days as celebrities hit on his dates, but as a PUA, he is not going to sit idly and let it happen to him. Strauss formulates a plan of action, that overall means that he needs to become more interesting than Andy Dick in this moment. It works, and he gets the girl. He “wins” her. He makes Andy Dick interested in him, thus making the girl more interested, as Mystery says if you “own the men, then you own the women.” Social power and dominance is flagrantly evinced here.

- Chapter five details Dustin’s reunion with Strauss. He has become spiritual, and pleads with Strauss to beware of the path he is on, as he, Dustin, did not get real joy from it, and found it empty. Strauss does not really listen, and does not want to give up his newfound power. This is looking at events morally, which might be a literary device, as in real life, despite ending the book and promoting it while being in a relationship, Strauss continues to Game both in the relationship, and when it ends. He does not leave the Game, despite the book seeming to end that way, with him in love and committing to a girl (Lisa). The last Strauss has seen of Dustin before this reunion, was a year previously, before getting into the Game, where Dustin was managing a nightclub in Russia, having a different girl each night of the week. Dustin, as a natural, has been in Strauss’ mind every day while learning pickup. Strauss wishes to create a new pickup model, based on Dustin’s natural abilities, but is shocked when Dustin reveals that he has found religion and is living in Jerusalem, celibate, no longer getting meaning or validation from women, whom he says were his false gods. He denounces his previous lifestyle, a move which Strauss is astonished by. Strauss says his own change is positive, as women like positive things in men, such as confidence, working out, eating healthier and being more fun.⁷¹⁶
- Chapter six finds Strauss and Mystery on another road trip, this time in Australia, where they have five workshops sold out in three cities. Homosociality and masculine bonding is present. Sweater has met the woman he wishes to marry, after four months of sarging. He invites them to Brisbane Mystery is facing an ultimatum by his girlfriend in Toronto, Patricia, and is depressed. Strauss is jealous of Sweater, not of his wealth, business, recent half a million dollars on a deal, or mansion, but of his success in finding a woman to commit to, as Strauss cannot say that of any girl he has met so far. Mystery’s workshop is declared to have changed all of their lives: bringing health, business, wealth, fun, travel, love and happiness in abundance. There are talks of plans, and humorous jabs at Mystery’s porn site ideas and tattoos. The PUA lifestyle, is for life, Strauss writes.
- Chapter seven is about Strauss’ most “monumental” trip related to seduction, involving a bootcamp, tattoos, Toronto for a one-on-one workshop with a student, then to New York for Mystery’s first classroom seminar, then to Bucharest for Project Bliss, where Mystery wishes to find two young bisexual girls to seduce and bring to Canada, get visas, and train them to become strippers, girlfriends and then his magic show assistants. Strauss comments sarcastically that tattoos and white slavery is where seduction has led him. Strauss gets a card from Dustin who gives him a Hebrew name, with good and bad in it, saying that Strauss is good, but has to be bad first to get to the good. Moral viewpoints on the seduction community are presented through this device. Patricia breaks up with Mystery for good. Strauss describes three types of men who attend the workshops, grading versions of masculinity.⁷¹⁷ By lacing so much of the story with the interactions and psychology and social dynamics of the “characters”, Strauss gets to the heart of what is interesting to a lot of people in everyday life, and what they think about in society.⁷¹⁸ The key to success, Strauss says, is to be your *best* self. Papa memorizes Strauss’ words, and uses them to pickup (he gets her number) Paris Hilton. Strauss says that

⁷¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 167. ““So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm learning how to pick up women, sure, but in the process, I'm becoming a better human being.””

⁷¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 172. “There were three types of people who signed up for the workshops. There were guys like Exoticoption from Belgrade, who were normal and well-adjusted socially, but wanted to have greater flexibility and choice in meeting girls. There were guys who were uptight and set in their ways, like Cliff, who couldn't even handle having a nickname like everybody else. They tended to gather as much knowledge as they could but had trouble making even the smallest behavioral change. And then there were people like Papa—approach machines who compensated for a lack of social skills with a lack of social fears. Approach machines tended to improve the fastest, simply by following the flowchart of material they were given. But once they ran out of material, they floundered. And this was going to be Papa's challenge. He was a soft-spoken Chinese pre-law student.”

⁷¹⁸ *ibid.* “There are certain bad habits we've groomed our whole life—from personality flaws to fashion faux pas. And it has been the role of parents and friends, outside of some minor tweaking, to reinforce the belief that we're okay just as we are. But it's not enough to just be yourself. You have to be your best self. And that's a tall order if you haven't found your best self yet.” “That's why the workshops were so life-transforming: We told each student the first impression he made. We weren't afraid of hurting his feelings. We corrected his every gesture, phrase, and item of clothing, because we knew he wasn't living up to his potential. None of us is. We get stuck in old thought and behavior patterns that may have been effective when we were twelve months or twelve years old, but now only serve to hold us back. And, while those around us may have no problem correcting our minor flaws, they let the big ones slide, because it would mean attacking who we are. But who are we, really? Just a bundle of good genes and bad genes mixed with good habits and bad habits. And since there's no gene for coolness or confidence, then being uncool and unconfident are just bad habits, which can be changed with enough guidance and will power. And that was Papa's asset: will power.”

the students begin to clone each other and their gurus, that it is not true teaching. He paints this as negative and not desirable, as the students are not finding their personalities underneath the routines. Strauss gets numbers easily on this night, due to his “seducers aura”. Celebrity rears its head again, as Strauss is mistaken for shaven-headed electronic singer Moby. Strauss realizes this is why he is having an ‘on’ night, and vows to get the same level of seductive skill as celebrities, due to their fame, naturally have.⁷¹⁹ He wants to get to the next level – showing hypercompetitiveness in society once more. Strauss does not call the girl he gets the number from, he wants her to like him for the real him – the new him. Self-identity and liquidity theories by Giddens and Bauman can be connected to this behavior. Papa repeats like a robot the things that Mystery and Strauss teaches him, with great results in the clubs. Strauss loses respect for women based on their predictive responses to the material that Papa is delivering, similar to how comedians lose respect for audiences when they laugh at the same points during a touring show, lamenting at how easily “manipulated” most people are. The ‘proximity’ concept is revealed in this chapter, when a girl is physically near a man, it means that she wants to be opened.⁷²⁰ They open the women, with jokes that in elementary school would be funny, the premise is that such jokes are funny again in the field. The Game works, in some sense proving that often looks and financial or material, or even physical success, is not enough to attract women. Women have created this field and habitus, and men have to learn how to navigate it.⁷²¹ They take the girls on “instant dates”, used in pickup to create time distortion and the illusion that the girls know them longer than they actually have. This is also termed “location bouncing” or “venue change”. Strauss sleeps with his target. Mystery tapes the interaction in the bar, and at breakfast the next day. Mystery and Strauss concoct the “freeze out” to take validation away from the woman if she is resisting seductive advances, thereby increasing the likelihood of her favorable response and sexual activity once attention is given back to her. They meet Juggler, who is now dating, and will leave the pickup community. They bring the girls back to Mystery’s place, and show them the video they edited, with Strauss saying that the person with the stronger “frame” or “reality”, wins, by being more decisive. Strauss tells his girl various lines from gurus, which he justifies with the explanation that he believes them, then delivers a line to her that is his own, which he also believes. He has some feelings for the girl, and she for him, however, the Game goes on.

- Chapter eight concerns homosocial bonding, as Strauss says that picking up girls together makes men grow close.⁷²² They share the joy of “victory” of having been intimate with the girls of their choice. This shows the social struggle that most men have, in meeting and sleeping with women, and the rejoicing there is afterwards, and sense of accomplishment at being successful males. Mystery asks Strauss if he is in this lifestyle for life, and tells him that he considers Strauss to be his equal and only competition. Strauss says that his dream has changed to having sex before he dies, to having a child before he dies, and he has not lost sight of this, despite his behavior. Yet he lives for experience, he wants to live life to the full, and to experience it all. Bauman’s work on identity and discontent reflects this postmodern condition.⁷²³ He cannot imagine choosing one person for life, he recognizes that this is potentially selfish. He wants freedom, and love, yet not the staleness of a hypothetical long relationship, or to take a backseat to their children in his woman’s love. His oats are always going to be wild, he says, and so the pickup thing is going to be a constant. He worries about this, and about having kids that could relate to him. Strauss reveals that he has a problem with commitment. Mystery’s girl does not join Mystery, Strauss and his girl the next evening, as she is with her boyfriend, and Mystery is saddened by this. He hates rejection. Strauss meets his teenage girlfriends’ baby, and family, again stating that he got into Game to have adventures.
- Chapter nine describes Mystery’s spiraling moods. Intellectually he is ok, but emotionally he is not, he sees his ex-girlfriend and gets down, obsessed only due to her rejection of him. He says to Strauss that he is a lover and that he loves women. Love is a Darwinian concept to Mystery, who calls it “pairbonding”; it is not spiritual or supernatural. Strauss comments on what the pickup students thought the pair were doing now, to what they actually are doing, in that moment. Image and reality, and liminality, can be noticed here.
- Chapter ten is an MSN group Mystery’s Lounge posting by Mystery, on his life goals. He also discusses polyamory, which the seduction community seems to promote as more an evolutionary norm and male right, than as a fringe lifestyle practice. He wants the lounge to not just be about pickup, but about life development

⁷¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 174. “All that time I’d put into seduction could be subverted simply with fame. To truly get to the next level, I’d have to find a way to flip the same attraction switches a celebrity does—chiefly validation and bragging rights—without being famous.”

⁷²⁰ *ibid.* p. 175. “When women stand near a man but facing away from him, especially when there’s no real reason for them to be hanging out in that particular spot, it trips what Mystery calls the proximity alert system. It means they’re interested; they want to be opened.”

⁷²¹ *ibid.* p. 176. “I just couldn’t reach what I call the hook point, which is when a woman you’ve approached decides she enjoys your company and doesn’t want you to leave. Though I stood just a foot away from Caroline, a mile-wide chasm separated us.”

⁷²² *ibid.* p. 180. “There is nothing more bonding than successfully picking up girls together. It is the basis for a great friendship. Because afterward, when the girls are gone, you can finally give each other the high-five that you’ve been holding back since you met them. It is the sweetest high-five in the world. It’s not just the sound of skin hitting skin; it’s the sound of brotherhood.”

⁷²³ Bauman, Z. 1997.

as a whole, eventually. This includes money, social status and other ambitions. Outside of the book, this is seen in the RSD company, which is currently branching into other areas of self-help and development. Self-fulfillment is the goal. Mystery wants the members to act like a corporation. Strauss includes a footnote on one of the members, lending further authenticity and legitimacy to the text. He wants the men to harness their sex drives and to build something. Successful masculinity in its most literal and holistic meaning, is shown in the text as a concern for these men, trying to live up to societal standards and ideas of happiness and achievement. Mystery advocates cutting down on masturbation, to harness energy.

- Chapter eleven details bringing Mystery to his sister's place, and their interactions there. Mystery has a confrontation with a tenant of the apartment building, both foreshadowing and reminding of his bipolar breakdown in the opening chapter, and the latter part of the book.
- Chapter twelve sees Strauss becoming fearful of going to his girlfriend Caroline's house in the suburbs again. He is afraid of boredom and becoming boring. His email inbox is full, with men looking for help from him. Mystery emails him, showing signs of emotional and mental degradation. Strauss visits Mystery. Movies that the characters are watching are often mentioned, in this case Mystery is watching Steven Spielberg's "A.I." on his laptop when Strauss arrives. He is not in good shape. Strauss suggests sarging. Mystery wants to cancel the New York and Bucharest plans, Strauss prevents him, as Strauss has booked a month out of his schedule for the trips. Strauss calls Mystery narcissistic and melodramatic in the text. Mystery is cold and mechanical in the interaction, and begins to play online poker. Strauss leaves, Caroline does not know what to say or do, Strauss admits to the reader that he hated her and her uselessness in that moment.

This partial analysis of the book 'The Game', will serve to drive the rest of my analysis of the piece as a whole. The themes and characteristics mentioned so far are repeated and play out through various events and characters for the remainder of the material. Homosociality, competition (for example between 'Tyler Durden' and Mystery for the students and business revenue), living with men in Project Hollywood, a lair which is located in a mansion where a group of men including Strauss and Mystery reside, celebrities such as Britney Spears, Courtney Love and Tom Cruise, being interviewed by Strauss, with his new social skills, legitimizing Game. These facets produce a compelling and postmodern take on contemporary life and the dating scene, and human interaction in general.

6.4 A Macro Multiperspectival Reading and Narrative Analysis of the Second Half of 'The Game'

Now I shall briefly analyze the material, using the template outlined by Coffey and Atkinson.⁷²⁴

<i>Structure</i>	<i>Question</i>
- Abstract	What was this about?
- Orientation	Who? What? Where? When?
- Complication	Then what happened?
- Evaluation	So what?
- Result	What finally happened?
- Coda	[Finish narrative]

Neil Strauss is a successful writer, journalist, and businessman, who was not good with women. He does not have much experience with them when the book opens. Due to an opportunity to research a secret underground society of pickup artists, he learns about Game, and becomes successful with women, meeting the top gurus in the community and becoming their peer.

The complication concerns Strauss' – and this is something all PUAs have to contend with on some level – growing arrogance and egotism, his disregard of women, as he gets more successful in bedding them, which in turn makes him more successful. The subculture and community he is involved in, begins to receive media and public exposure, and he recounts and documents how personalities and masculinities are changed by this. The feminist agenda and society's disbelief in the legitimacy or aversion to Game, is also noted. This perhaps is why Strauss includes various comments and moral judgements against himself in the book – not to disavow what he is doing, but to 'future proof' and 'critic proof' the text as much as possible from attack, and to show that he is morally well-rounded, but still 'a man', and wont to do what men do and want to do. Tensions and disputes within the community add drama to the narrative, as does interactions with the public and celebrities, where the Game is exposed or revealed and potentially open to change or negative reactions from the masses.

Among the many reasons this is interesting, is the tension between people who are learning how to be social, and the mainstream society, that perhaps thinks it is well adjusted, but frowns on these pickup artists and their community, keeping to a safe and politically correct narrative, that does not correspond to reality as it is being shown in biology, evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology. Aside from this, the narrative of a man who wants to be good with women, and who then does so by learning it – previously a feat generally thought not to be learnable – is socially very interesting, rich with angles and avenues which a social scientist can explore. That there is a technique or techniques that can be learned, along with a mindset, and scientific theoretical backup, behind this, is revelatory. Attraction, having sex with women, and falling in love, does not 'just happen'.

What finally happens is Strauss meets a woman who he describes as being immune to the Game. However, he initially meets her as a result of all that he has learned, it has got him to that point. He is confident, and a man who knows how to attract women and sleep with them. She resists his advances for a few weeks, yet still spends time with him. Eventually, she acquiesces and they begin a serious dating relationship. He loves her, he has found love. He tears up all of the numbers he has acquired from women in the last few years, as a symbol that he is leaving that life behind. In reality, Strauss did not fully leave the pickup life, and the pair broke up after approximately a year and a half. However, as far as the narrative is concerned, Strauss views himself as someone who got out of control, drunk on social power and wielding it to his own pleasure, who then is reflexive and understands the value of 'intimate connection' with a woman. The rest of the characters in the book go their separate ways, and find success financially due, in part, to Strauss' exposing the community via an article he writes for the New York Times newspaper, increasing popularity of bootcamps and seminars, and mainstream news and media coverage of pickup, the Game, and the seduction community.

Strauss says his next book will be about relationships and love, which is an entirely different 'game'. In reality, he wrote 'The Rules of the Game', a how-to self-help book, his own take on Game, as well as establishing his own attraction and dating company, and releasing audio and video material on Game. This year, he is releasing 'The Truth', after he has had a child and got married in the last year; this book is purported to be about lessons learned while trying to let go of compulsive sarging and picking up women, and striving to be monogamous. He touches on these themes in 'The Rules of the Game' also.

⁷²⁴ Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. 1996.

Now, I turn to the main question of the dissertation, using this macro multiperspectival narrative analysis:

Research Question

- In what ways does Neil Strauss use and show a successful and powerful masculinity status in the dating arena with women, in his book “The Game”?

The narrated, performed, promoted version of successful masculinity in ‘The Game’ can be viewed as idealized and constructed. There is a strong theme that men were real men in cavemen times, that this is what men’s behavior should aim towards, that modern society has emasculated, and feminized men. It is ironic that in the pursuit of individuality – ‘the pickup artist has to be different from all other men’ – the same model, or few models, of masculinity are studied and appropriated as being sufficient for emulating and to appropriate for success with women and in life.

Although Strauss’ goal is to be as good as ‘naturals’ and the best gurus in the community, he also stresses the importance of adventure, utilization of time to the maximum efficient benefit, and the ongoing process of creating and maintain a ‘best self’.

Success is never outrightly defined in the book, however it is heavily alluded to throughout the text. Success entails freedom of movement, financial independence, social status, alpha masculinity and leadership, a strong and well-groomed appearance, good clothes, and the ability as a man to attract the women you desire. It is an adventure story with a hero arc, in which the loser becomes a sex god, morally questions himself, and then redeems himself by falling in love and committing monogamously to a woman. In this sense, it plays into the slowly diminishing western ideal of lifelong romantic partnership and monogamy. One does get the feeling that the story is only beginning, and indeed Strauss does write that in the time that he has left Project Hollywood and written the book, a new book’s worth of stories has occurred.⁷²⁵

Powerful masculinity does not limit itself to definitions of physical strength. Rather, it also entails exuding an aura and presence when one enters the room, someone who is captivating and commands attention,

‘The Game’ is at times a cautionary tale, as ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’. By analyzing social behavior nuances and layers, and running programs that hijack these social structures, the PUAs gain an upper hand in the dating world, if not bettering, then at least being equal to the rich, successful, muscular jocks that domineer access to beautiful women. This power comes with a downside if other areas of life are neglected. Mystery starts to downward spiral into depression, and Papa is flunking out of graduate school, due to inordinate amounts of time being spent going out, sarging, and learning pickup.⁷²⁶ The thrill of meeting new people, and seducing new women, it shows, can be intoxicating. Strauss writes sentences which betray his glee and his excitement at learning Game.⁷²⁷ The book is not simply a cautionary tale, as it encourages and legitimizes Game, at the same time as making readers wary of its power. Strauss describes many successful models and techniques, and points readers at other books that contain further instructions.

Tackling the feminist angle, and the self-help premise of the community, Strauss describes a culture that at times dehumanizes both women but the men – many of the men are social robots, unable or uninterested in any activity beyond seducing an endless number of sex objects, they do not consider being friends with women as worthwhile. There are arguments in the community over women, money and status. Some fail to escape, or fall into depression; others look to fill the holes in their life with religion; and Neil Strauss gets himself a girlfriend.⁷²⁸ This type of ending can be viewed as Strauss trying not to alienate a mass readership of mainstream thinking people, he is kowtowing to the

⁷²⁵ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 449. “In the time since this book was written, enough has occurred in Project Hollywood and in the lives of the characters in this book to warrant a sequel. However, a synopsis will have to suffice. My story is done. Let the credits roll...”

⁷²⁶ *ibid.* p. 194. “An hour later, my cell phone rang. It was Papa. “I’m scared,” he said. “So am I,” I told him. “I don’t know whether this is just a cry for attention or the real thing.” “I feel the same way as Mystery.” His voice was distant and weak. “My life is going all the way down. All I am is game. I haven’t opened a book since school started. And I need to get accepted into law school.” Papa wasn’t an exception. There was something about the community that took over people’s lives.”

⁷²⁷ *ibid.* p. 150. “But now, when I walked into a club, I felt a rush of power, wondering which woman would have her tongue down my throat within a half hour.”

⁷²⁸ *ibid.* p. 436. “To win the game was to leave it.”

masses, while perhaps subtly and not so subtly promoting Game and his own stake in it, while simultaneously praising the benefits of learning Game and being social.

Due to the cautionary tale bragging about how the protagonist triumphs over the thing that brought him so much pleasure and so much pain, in the end it reinforces a conventional morality – which, in light of the material, is surprising, and perhaps a little disappointing. It can also be viewed as another type of subversion, however. It does not lessen the temptation of the hedonistic lifestyle that the story partially condemns, a culture which has its own morals, such as ‘leave her better than when you found her’. It also does not render the models of the seduction community as being ineffective. The morality tale allows the narrator to maintain a sensual and depraved charm while remaining morally irreproachable.

References to movies and other popular culture – as well as more “highbrow” culture such as James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ occur frequently in the text. The novel and film ‘Fight Club’ is mentioned many times, one PUA goes by the name Tyler Durden, (Owen Cook of RSD company), another turns Project Hollywood into a dormitory for aspiring PUAs, Strauss consistently describes the PUAs imitating him as an army, or a group of clones. At one point, consciously or unconsciously echoing the movie ‘Fight Club’. He writes about the groups or ‘lairs’ that spring up in each city after a workshop is held there.⁷²⁹ These are similar to events in Fight Club, where men in homosocial gatherings and relations exhibit and test their masculinity in an increasingly liminal, postmodern, capitalistic, materialistic, hypercompetitive, emasculating, information-saturated, individualistic, fragmented society.⁷³⁰ Strauss’ writing is cinematic in this sense. At the end, the reader feels as if they have been seduced by Strauss’ writing and story, the cautionary elements that he chooses to intersperse within the narrative and the ending. It is a story that stresses the importance of finding and building healthy relationships while overcoming the insecurities of facing the opposite sex – a balance that is difficult to pull off.

Taking the above into account, it can seem that when Strauss, as author and primary character in ‘The Game’, shows readers his vulnerability, his egotism, his insecurities and weaknesses, his honesty, his compassion and kindness, his empathy, his wit and intelligence, his skills at seducing women, is wielding his own version of successful masculinity and alpha maleness: He is a man who attended college, worked hard and became a journalist very quickly in the New York Times, wrote for national American publications, met famous writers, musicians and actors, wrote a number of bestselling books on bands, musicians and celebrities, ascended to the top of the pickup community to be named ‘Best Pickup Artist in the World’, changed his persona⁷³¹ to become more likeable, and fluid in social interactions, changed and improved his posture, his looks (shaving his head, dressing well, getting a tan), his eyesight, his health and fitness (going to the gym, learning how to surf), being sensitive and aware of opportunities, established his own business and taught Game, appeared in music videos of famous musicians, and so on. The man is accomplished, successful, has proven his masculinity – both outside the book, and, important to this dissertation, inside the book, as the text shows his rise in the seduction community and mastery over self and interactions with others. That the book became a bestseller, and still is an in-demand book, demonstrates this by extension. It is even among the most stolen books in bookshops and libraries.⁷³²

In the context of the dating arena, Strauss shows his success as a man, by describing numerous encounters with women, and how he increasingly gained knowledge and skill the more he met them, the more he practiced sarging, and the more he sleeps with them. He embodies his definition of masculinity, or at least his approximation and rendering of masculinity, as do all of the students and PUAs. This means that the interpretation of what masculinity is, is both rigid and flexible.⁷³³ These men are not all ‘losers’. Many of them are accomplished in many different ways, except for not

⁷²⁹ *ibid.* p. 149. “Every time we left a city, a lair sprung up if one didn’t exist already, bringing together students eager to practice their new skills.”

⁷³⁰ *ibid.* p. 194. “It wasn’t just a lifestyle; it was a disease. The more time you devoted to it, the better you got. And the better you got, the more addictive it became. Guys who had never been to clubs could now walk in, be superstars, and leave with pockets full of phone numbers and girls on their arms. And then, as icing on the cake, they could write a field report and brag about it to everyone else in the community. There were people who were quitting their jobs and dropping out of school in order to master the game. Such was the power and lure of success with women.”

⁷³¹ *ibid.* p. 272. “Throughout this whole pickup process, I’d been trying on clothes and behaviors I’d never thought were me. Some of them worked, so I kept them; others didn’t, so I discarded them. I decided to take a chance.”

⁷³² Bell, D. C. 2012. *From Book to Board Game to Box Office: An Interview with ‘The Game’ Writer Neil Strauss*. “Barnes and Noble keeps the book behind the counter because they say it’s the most stolen book there next to the Bible so I think that either shows... I’m not sure what it shows – I think it is cause it’s embarrassing to buy. “The Game” is about that male insecurity and shame, and that it’s embarrassing to buy... it speaks to what the books about. I never thought of that before – I just realized now... why does one have to be embarrassed that they’re learning how to be better at meeting women, which could lead to marriage and children? I mean, that should be an admirable thing but they’re embarrassed about it... it’s interesting.”

⁷³³ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 195. “[in Mystery’s Lounge MSN group] we had a valuable network at our disposal. The Lounge linked together surgeons, students, bodyguards, movie directors, fitness trainers, software developers, concierges, stockbrokers, and psychiatrists.”

knowing how to approach and attract women, because such things are not self-evident, otherwise everyone would be naturally able to do it. Others have success with women, they just want to get better at the skill. Equally, Strauss takes jabs at himself, to shockingly and painfully honest degrees. An example is where Strauss is sarging with Tyler Durden, Mystery and other PUAs, and opens a porn star. He gets her so turned on that she brings him to the bathroom, where he cannot get an erection, and does not know why. Afterwards, he is not able to look her in the eye, and he concludes the chapter with a pathetic, harsh and sad description of himself.⁷³⁴ The author certainly covers all angles, in his partial autobiographical book, so much so that it is difficult to say conclusively that Strauss writes to bolster his own masculinity. The pressure, socially and internally, of being a successful man, is starkly rendered here. It may perhaps be better to look at Strauss' success with women and alpha masculinity in the context of the feats achieved within the text.⁷³⁵

The chapter where he details in a list a few of the conquests he has, is compelling, bombastic and full of boasting, yet Strauss still sincerely manages to situate it within a bigger discourse of both helpfulness and positivity of self-improvement, reaching happiness, and parallel to that, a sense of loss and superficiality – again, this may only be to pander to a more conservative mainstream narrative. He also has modesty and is humble – when he makes the point that he does not *always* have sex with a girl, as being a PUA sometimes means saying no. The chapter is pivotal and the text hits with brute force, as social conventions are turned on their heads, the fact that women do not usually say what they mean in social interactions is revealed, the connections at once deep and shallow, meaningful and meaningless, are documented. Strauss is optimizing his experience in life, his meetings and potential to seduce women, optimizing his masculinity and alpha representation. Strauss has superpowers, and knows exactly what to do to make a woman attracted to him, and to have sex with her. He sees the big picture, “the matrix”. He understands the process of attraction and the signals that women give.

The following chapter underlines this point, with a posting by ‘Thundercat’ on ‘Thundercat’s Seduction Lair’, calling Style the best PUA operating in the Game.⁷³⁶ He further calls Style manipulative, a person who comes in under the radar, and gets people to qualify themselves to him, without being aware until after the fact, powerful due to his subtlety, and almost Machiavellian in nature, one to admire and fear. In effect, this combines bragging with social proof, authenticity in lieu of modesty, homosocial relations⁷³⁷, social dynamics, male/female relations, power, sexuality, insecurity, identity, consumption⁷³⁸, advertising and a host of other factors that I have outlined in the Theory chapter, in particular the writings of Kimmel, Bauman, Giddens and Kress. Strauss is in the Game to both meet women, and lead men. He wants to exposure the community before it is exposed elsewhere by someone else, and he wants to make sure his pivotal role in it is acknowledged.⁷³⁹ He also wants the community to be legitimized, and his fights with editors and skeptical people evince this shock and disbelief from the majority who buy into the mainstream narrative.

⁷³⁴ *ibid.* p. 281. “I couldn't look Faith in the eye afterward. I had built myself up as such a mysterious, fascinating, sexually powerful guy. And then, in the moment of truth, the lies had come crashing down, revealing a skinny bald guy with a limp dick.”

⁷³⁵ *ibid.* pp. 209 – 212. “Petra was a nineteen-year-old Czech with long chestnut hair [...] We followed and made love to them as they chattered away in Czech to each other. Anya was a whip-smart twenty-two-year-old Croatian who was vacationing with her younger sister. [...] ... we found a docked sailboat. We snuck on board and had sex in the galley. I left twenty euros for the bottle of wine we drank. Carrie was a nineteen-year-old waitress at Dublin's in Los Angeles. She approached me and complimented me on my dreadlocks; I neglected to tell her I was wearing a Rastafarian wig as a joke. I met her the next day completely bald, but we still ended up in bed together. When I e-mailed her the next day to tell her she'd left her rings at my house, she responded, “I don't wear rings. They're not mine.” Martine was a free-spirited blonde I met in New York [...] In the bar, I asked her how good she was in bed, on a scale of one to ten. In my hotel room, I found out. She was a seven. Laranya was a JAP in the body of an Indian woman. I'd met her when I was in college and we were both interning at the same weekly newspaper. She was the hot intern; I was the shy intern. But when I ran into her years later in Los Angeles, Style took her out on the town. The first thing she said when we woke up together was, “I can't believe how much you've changed.” Neither could I. Stacy was a twenty-eight-year-old anorexic I met in Chicago. [...] I put a finger inside her and felt a fleshy cord bisecting her vagina like a tennis net. It was her hymen. I told her I didn't want to be the one to take her virginity. That's when I realized that being a PUA sometimes meant saying no. [...] My wish had come true. Women were no longer a challenge. They were a pleasure.”

⁷³⁶ *ibid.* p. 213.

⁷³⁷ *ibid.* p. 241. “Though I'd more than attained my goal as a pickup artist, along the way I had accidentally found the sense of camaraderie and belonging that had eluded me my whole life.”

⁷³⁸ *ibid.* p. 239. “We were the creators and beneficiaries of a body of knowledge that was light years beyond the rest of the mating world. We had developed an entirely new paradigm of sexual relations—one that gave men the upper hand, or at least the illusion of having the upper hand. There was a market for this.”

⁷³⁹ *ibid.* p. 240. “I realized that it was time for me to move. This was getting too big. The lid was going to blow. I'd been in the community for a year and a half since taking Mystery's first workshop. It was time to stake a claim on the seduction subculture before another writer beat me to it. It was time to reveal myself. It was time to remind myself that I wasn't just a PUA; I was a writer. I had a career. So I called an editor I knew at the Style section of the New York Times. It seemed like an appropriately named section to write for. No one ever posted their real names online; we called each other by our nicknames. Even Ross Jeffries and David DeAngelo were pseudonyms. Our real-world jobs and identities were unimportant. Thus, everyone in the community knew me as Style. Few, if anyone, knew my real name or that I wrote for the Times. It wasn't easy to get the story into the newspaper. It took two months of going back and forth with editors, writing draft after draft. They wanted more skepticism. They wanted proof

The book and the seduction community have had an effect on self-help culture, and the wider society, in the way that life improvements are now spoken about: There is a greater emphasis on holistically improving one's own life, people are more aware that a better life has balance.⁷⁴⁰ This was perhaps considered and discussed more metaphorically in the past, now it is quantified via testable results technologically and scientifically. Examples include more nuanced gym techniques, and the ways in which it has been proven what photos of men women respond to the best, the pose, angle and activity that a man should be doing for his portrait or profile photograph, and so on.

Strauss, like many of the PUAs and students he describes in the text, is obsessed with getting better at the Game, to the extent that friends and family fall by the wayside. Other drop out of school or college, or quit their jobs, in an effort to sarge more of the time and get more girls, unaware of the necessity of balance and health in their lives. Yet, Strauss gains so many followers, and men who want to be just like him, to the point of shaving their heads and getting their ears pierced, even if they are not previously balding.⁷⁴¹ This again shows the power of social dynamics, and successful masculinity, to both men and women. Learning seduction and practicing it, is seductive.

Interestingly, Strauss has claimed numerous times that 'The Game' is about male insecurity and shame.⁷⁴² It tries to present the average male mind, free of feminist or politically correct restrictions or repercussions. Yet, it is also about the power of transformation, and the triumph of the underdog. It is about seeing reality⁷⁴³ as it really is, too, so that women are viewed as wanting sex as much as, if not more than, men, they are just restricted in this expression initially due to social programming. Indeed, it can be seen as somewhat revelatory that women often are as "shallow" as men.⁷⁴⁴ This contradictory and paradoxical nature of the text, its viewpoints and message – that Game is great, but men are insecure, and it is dangerous⁷⁴⁵ – is fragmented and disjointed, yet the text flows logically, poetically, is crafted superbly and is easy to read. Strauss' thought processes in various moments' "real time" are conveyed throughout many scenes in the book.⁷⁴⁶ The authentic is mixed with celebratory positivity, yet also hints of egotism and self-promotion, not just of Game, but of Strauss/Style himself. Hall, Evans and Nixon comment on this mirroring of society by media, and by our own reflexive consciousness.⁷⁴⁷ The transformation that these men undergo can be a positive or negative, or signal some prior trauma.⁷⁴⁸ Generally though, they aim to make themselves better people, they view pickup as a means

of the powers of the various gurus. They wanted the inherent weirdness of the techniques to be acknowledged. They seemed to have trouble believing that these people—and this world— really existed."

⁷⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 195. "You have to learn balance, man. Pickup should just be a glorified hobby." It was wise advice—advice I should have been following myself."

⁷⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 214, 287, 291 and 297. "Two of the Croatian pickup artists I was staying with had even shaved their head in emulation of pictures of me they had seen online." "We were breeding an army." "They clustered in groups, prowling for open sets and sending in emissaries to say, "Hey, I need to get a female opinion on something."" "They couldn't stop talking about this stuff." "[at the first Pickup Artist summit] Now I looked around the living room and saw neediness and hunger and desperation. Bald guys with goatees—miniature and super-sized versions of myself—asked me to pose for photos with them. Good-looking guys who could have been models clamored for advice on hairstyles and clothes to buy, and then asked me to pose for photos with them." "In every club, I saw their shaven heads, their diabolical goatees, their shoes that looked like the pair I'd bought in the Beverly Center a week before. Mini-mes were everywhere. And there was nothing I could do about it."

⁷⁴² Bell, D. C. 2012. "I think a lot of people feel like it's a how-to book... ..but in a lot of ways it's about male insecurity and fears with [being] around women and trying to be honest about the male mind. And that's what I think, I mean – for me that's what made the book, helped people connect with the book. It may be the transformation part of it too, but also I think because... just being honest without fear of reprisal about how most guys think."

⁷⁴³ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 248. "I began to think that perhaps routines weren't training wheels after all; they were the bike. Every form of demagoguery depends on them. Religion is pickup. Politics is pickup. Life is pickup. Every day, we have our routines, which we rely on to make people like us or to get what we want or to make someone laugh or to endure another day without letting anyone know the nasty thoughts we're really thinking about them."

⁷⁴⁴ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 219.

⁷⁴⁵ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 195. "Everyone who gets too absorbed in the game is depressed," Papa said. "Ross Jeffries, Mystery, me. I want Mystery's game, but not at the expense of life." The problem was that this epiphany was coming too late for Papa. He'd already signed up for seminars with David X and David DeAngelo. All of it, of course, meant blowing off days of classes."

⁷⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 215. "[As I write this, I look up and, I swear to God, there is a girl on top of me. She has blonde hair and a sleeveless undershirt with a black bra underneath. She is smiling at me. I am inside her. She is biting her lower lip as she rubs her clit against my pelvic bone. I can hear her gasping. She is supporting herself with one hand on my thigh and the other lightly resting on the top of the computer. "You know it turns me on when you click the typewriter," she just said. "Can I put you in my mouth for a minute?" So fuck the stereotypical image of the writer. This is the new one. I can get work done and play at the same time. It reminds me of sometkhing Steve P. said, about always being in your own reality. Everyone is jus a guest in it. So if it's my work time, and you want to have sex with me, well,e welcome to my reality. I think she's about to come. She is coming allksd;Good for her.]6 6 This portion of the text has not been edited in order to preserve its authenticity."

⁷⁴⁷ Hall, S., Evans, J. and Nixon, S. 1997, 2013.

⁷⁴⁸ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 199. "I left Mystery in his room, went to the kitchen, and dialed information for his parents' number. His real-world name was Erik von Markovik, but that was just another illusion. He'd legally changed it from his birth name, Erik Horvat-Markovic."

to do this, turning to PUAs for the answers.⁷⁴⁹ Depending on how it is practiced⁷⁵⁰ and how much auxiliary material and other sides of life one decides to improve simultaneously, the capacity for Game itself to improve a person's life is variable. If it is done properly, the results are usually positive, as Strauss' text shows in many cases, particularly in the acknowledgments at the end.⁷⁵¹

The gurus begin to ape Style's techniques, and as his power grows, Strauss realizes that his mindset has become warped, but he still continues accelerating learning and quantified maximization of his potential.⁷⁵² Strauss seems to be above the drama in the Project Hollywood house, while being a part of it himself. It is a feat that is seemingly liminal and fluid, as if he is there and not there. Bauman, when theorizing on 'liquid life',⁷⁵³ postulates that in postmodern hypercapitalist life, we have a fluid identity, that is reshaped every moment, it must not fit too well as at any time one might need to shed it, and adapt or put on another identity, according to the situation or purpose. Therefore life and personal attributes are not seen so much as qualities, but more like utilities.

Strauss name drops celebrities and details his encounters with them, showing his professional life intertwining with his seduction secret identity, he references rappers such as Jay-Z, and he recounts time spent with Tom Cruise – showing cultural relevance and that he has a place and a link with these purveyors of culture, social power, and admiration. Strauss has the idea of Project Hollywood, a headquarters where all the best PUA gurus would live and sarge, it would be a church with Mystery and Style presiding over it like high priests.⁷⁵⁴ This idea then branches out to other cities worldwide, with 'projects' and 'lair's' of men who are into the pickup lifestyle and self-improvement. Strauss veers between boasting and a humble person who cannot believe the advancement in life skills he has⁷⁵⁵, while also having his previous view of reality and how humans behave socially, blown away. He can see the patterns underneath the apparent genuine exterior of social dynamics, to a new understanding of what is occurring and truly "genuine".⁷⁵⁶

The author is able to transmute various qualities of the gurus he meets, while still holding onto the identity that he has prior to undertaking the journey into the underworld of the seduction community. Examples of the drama include Mystery's suicidal tendencies, the Project Hollywood squabbles, and his own inner turmoil making him doubt what he is doing, the supposed moral quandary of doing Game. The humorous tone of some of the material cannot be dismissed either, as it crosses voyeuristic, gonzo and ethnographic boundaries and lines constantly.⁷⁵⁷ This semi-locker room talk, crude and abrasive at times, though between men who in general are not seen as being macho or jocks by society, is candid and also does not seem to be edited too much for mainstream acceptance. That Strauss has the "authority" to

⁷⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 203. "...the community was growing exponentially. More and more newbies were flocking to the boards. They were young kids—some of them still in high school—and they looked to us PUAs for advice on not just seduction and socializing but everything. They wanted to know what college to apply to; if they should stop taking prescribed psychiatric medication; if they should masturbate, wear condoms, do drugs, run away from home. They wanted to know what to read, think, and do to be like us."

⁷⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 288. "There were guys who won girlfriends by chasing them until they relented and agreed to meet. But I wasn't a chaser. I wasn't a plower. All I did was give her the opportunity to like me, and either she did or didn't. Usually she did."

⁷⁵¹ *ibid.* pp. 449 – 452.

⁷⁵² *ibid.* p. 214. "I could no longer claim to be a student. Neil Strauss was officially dead. In the eyes of these men, I was Style, the king of the unnaturals. All over the world people were using my jokes, my comebacks, my lines, my words to meet, kiss, and fuck girls."

⁷⁵³ Bauman, Z. 2005.

⁷⁵⁴ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 251 and 252. "The right lifestyle is something that is worn, not discussed. Money, fame, and looks, though helpful, are not required. It is, rather, something that screams: Ladies, abandon your boring, mundane, unfulfilled lives and step into my exciting world, full of interesting people, new experiences, good times, easy living, and dreams fulfilled. Sarging was for students, not players, of the game. It was time to take this brotherhood to the next level, time to pool our resources and design a lifestyle in which the women came to us. It was time for Project Hollywood."

⁷⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 276. "I know I should be humble about the dual-induction massage and pretend like it was another step down a degrading path. But discovering the secret to threesomes was like finding the Rosetta Stone of pickup. Once the dual-induction massage routine was developed and shared, PUAs all over the world started having threesomes. It was like breaking the three-minute mile. The dual-induction massage would ultimately ensure my ranking as the number one PUA on Thundercat's list for a second year running. Project Hollywood was already a success."

⁷⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 252. "Mystery had recently developed another theory of social interaction. It basically stated that women are constantly judging a man's value in order to determine if it can help them with their life objectives of survival and replication." "What got me laid on my birthday was not sarging but lifestyle. And building a lifestyle is cumulative. Everything you do counts and brings you closer to your goal."

⁷⁵⁷ Strauss, N. 2005. pp. 203 and 204. "One of those lost souls was a short, well-muscled Lebanese student in his early twenties known as Prizer. He was from El Paso and had never even kissed a girl. He wanted advice on how to get comfortable around women, so we told him that first he needed to make female friends. And, second, he needed to experience sex, and not be too picky about a partner. He took us a little too literally. Witness a few choice excerpts from his field reports [...] [from Prizer's field reports] I had sex again in Juarez. This makes four hookers for me now [...] Anyway, what I did this time to help my game is I pretended like she was my girlfriend. But when I wanted to eat her ass out, she charged me an extra five bucks. That was lame."

claim authorship over this community, and in a sense speak for them⁷⁵⁸, further showcases his successful masculinity, as his demonstrable masculinity is on display, in subtle and non-subtle ways in the interactions between community members, and he can gain what he wants from them, while usually it being a win-win situation for the other. A case in point being his taking care of Mystery when he is having an emotional breakdown. Strauss gets fans, and dozens of emails from people wanting to pay him to see him in action in the field, either flying to him, or having him fly out somewhere. Strauss lays the moralistic tidbits more and more from the midpoint of the book onwards.⁷⁵⁹

The paradox of Strauss writing of the virtues of Game on the one hand, and the dark side of Game on the other, may seem hypocritical. At no point in the story does he give up his “superhero” status, bedding countless women⁷⁶⁰, though he does always remain conscientious and reflexive, even if acting morally dubious, to mainstream standards. He makes the point that with great power, comes great responsibility – a paean to his classic literature that he loves, and also superhero contemporary character arcs.

Yet, he is self-advertising, both within the text as Style and as the writer himself. There is the power of marketing and of being a leader of men⁷⁶¹ – an aphrodisiac for women.⁷⁶² Strauss can feel more himself, and ethical as a PUA, despite some moral misgivings.⁷⁶³ He is sincere, even when he is not being sincere, and this has varying effects on women, most of whom still sleep with him.⁷⁶⁴ His view of reality keeps changing, as he sees what is possible, without deceit or coercion – regular threesomes with different women, dating multiple women at the same time who all know about each other – all frowned upon or not lent credence to by mainstream thought and society. This is evidence of not just male “manipulation” or the successful principles of Game, but of female double standards and social evasion of acknowledgment of objective reality, where women actually do not object to what mainstream feminist narrative says they object to.⁷⁶⁵ To lend airs of honesty and truth to the text, Strauss puts footnotes in the text, showing his research of facts, and proof of events.⁷⁶⁶ To try to tackle the Game from all angles, Strauss does not commit to any one point of view wholeheartedly, as when at one point he says the Game relies a lot on chance, contradicting most of the rest of the text.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁵⁸ *ibid.* p. 269. “Nobody had understood the potential of this whole pickup community, the bonding power of dudes talking about chicks. We had manicures, we had mansions, and we had game. We were ready to infect the world like a disease.”

⁷⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 204. “But seduction is a dark art. Its secrets come with a price and we were all paying it, whether in sanity, school, work, time, money, health, morality, or loss of self. We may have been supermen in the club, but on the inside we were rotting.”

⁷⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 218.

⁷⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 241. “Sargers Googled my name and ordered my books on Amazon, writing long posts detailing my career. When I asked them to keep my realworld and my online identities separate—especially since I didn’t want women I met looking up field reports I’d written about them—they actually agreed. I was still in charge.”

⁷⁶² *ibid.* “All those posts where I’d explained my routines and discussed my nights out hadn’t just been a way of learning and sharing; they’d also been a form of advertising.”

⁷⁶³ *ibid.* p. 214 and 215. “...the pressure ran both ways: I also began to develop unreasonable expectations of myself. If I was at an Italian restaurant and there was an alluring woman five tables away, I felt like a failure if I didn’t sarge her. If I was walking to the dry cleaners and an aspiring actress-model-waitress passed by, I felt like a hypocrite if I didn’t open her. And where simply talking to a stranger was enough to elate me in my AFC days, now I needed to have her in my bed within a week. Though I knew my new mindset was seriously warped, I felt more ethical in many ways as a PUA than I had been as an AFC. Part of learning game was not just memorizing openers and phone game and rapport-building tactics, but learning how to be honest with a woman about what I expected from her and what she could expect from me. It was no longer necessary to deceive a woman by telling her I wanted a relationship when I just wanted to get laid; by pretending to be her friend when I only wanted to get in her pants; by letting her think we were in a monogamous relationship when I was seeing other women.”

⁷⁶⁴ *ibid.* p. 271. “I was seeing about ten different girls now. They were what the PUAs call MLTRs—multiple long-term relationships. Unlike AFCs, I never lied to these girls. They all knew I was seeing other people. And, to my surprise, even if it didn’t make all of them happy, none of them left me. One of the most important realizations I’d had in the game came from a Huna self-improvement book that Ross Jeffries had recommended, *Mastering Your Hidden Self*. It taught me the idea that, “The world is what you think it is.” In other words, if you believe that you need to have a harem and having a harem is normal, women will agree to it. It’s simply your reality. However, if you want a harem but secretly feel that it’s cheating and unethical, you’ll never have one.”

⁷⁶⁵ *ibid.* p. 242. “If I told a woman that I was a pickup artist before sleeping with her, she’d still have sex with me, but she’d make me wait a week or two longer just to ensure that she was different from all the other girls. If I told a girl I was a pickup artist after sleeping with her, she was usually amused and intrigued by the whole idea, and convinced that I hadn’t been running game on her. However, her tolerance for the community lasted only until we broke up or stopped seeing each other, at which point it was used against me. The problem with being a pickup artist is that there are concepts like sincerity, genuineness, trust, and connection that are important to women. And all the techniques that are so effective in beginning a relationship violate every principle necessary to maintaining one.”

⁷⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 246 [footnote at bottom of page, relating to what Tom Cruise has told Strauss about Ross Jeffries] “10 When asked how he had come up with the character of T.J. Mackey in an interview in *Creative Screenwriting* in 2000, however, Paul Thomas Anderson did mention researching Ross Jeffries.”

⁷⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 321. “Despite our supposed skill, mating is largely a game of chance. Women are at different places in their lives when we meet them. They may be looking for a boyfriend, a one-night stand, a husband, or a revenge fuck. Or they may be looking for nothing at all, because they’re in a happy relationship or recovering from an emotionally destructive one.”

By the end of the text, Strauss has rejoined mainstream society. Perhaps not all the way, but enough to be recognizable to the average reader, and relatable to traditionalists and feminists, and politically correct spectators – he has found love, has renounced the pickup lifestyle, stays in touch with PUAs, is thankful for his lessons both good and bad, and is ready to enjoy a committed relationship. He apologizes for exposing the world of Game to the mainstream, and yet consoles by stating that there will always be a way for men and women to meet and have sex. Strauss is in the position of knowledge, power and authority, choosing to reassure his readers.

The text in a macro sense is about human social reality, and human potential. Strauss constantly challenges himself to change himself and his life, wanting to be the best, or better, and experience every moment, learning hypnosis, surfing, and trying to sleep diet in order to maximize time and have optimal productivity and efficiency.⁷⁶⁸

Strauss, in the text, constantly has to prove his worth, to himself and others. This endless reflexivity is grating and wearying.⁷⁶⁹ Even when he leaves the Game, he is still needing to prove himself, in new arenas.⁷⁷⁰ The pressures of postmodernity and liquid life are ever present. He has gone, as in the book's illustrative drawings depicting him, as the main character of the story, from hunched awkward nerd, to a sophisticated James Bond/Casanova type of definitive alpha male.

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid.* p. 270.

⁷⁶⁹ *ibid.* p. 214. "Now I had to prove myself every time I went out. Guys in the community would ask behind my back, "How is Style? Is he any good?" If I didn't walk up to a group of girls and make out with the hottest one within fifteen minutes, they'd think I was a fraud. Before I joined the community, I had been afraid of failing in front of women. Now I was afraid of failing in front of men."

⁷⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 452. "Being together has required a lot more time and work than learning to pick up women ever did, but it has brought me far greater satisfaction and joy."

Auxiliary Questions

- (a) How are the norms of successful masculinity constructed in the text?

Strauss does provide some lessons in *Game*, such as the chapter where he details a hypothetical sarge, making sure to let the reader know that some of the concepts involved were invented by him.⁷⁷¹ The interaction, getting to know someone, and genuine connection – despite the social tactics used to facilitate this connection – are stressed. This is how a man to woman relationship should be, if it is done correctly, the text says. Masculinity, then, involves competence, pride, knowledge, leadership, strength and sexual prowess, traits that Kimmel discusses in his work as holding men back⁷⁷² and causing unnecessary pressure. This view fails to take into account a realist and genetic view to how life is, where Darwinian elements ensure that struggles can be a permanent element.⁷⁷³ Mystery is described as liking “boys toys” such as computers, digital and electronic technology, and computer video games.

Style’s own personality is deconstructed by Tyler Durden of RSD in the book, and along with his *Game* tactics, used to build – methodically and scientifically – a model of pickup, thereby advancing *Game* and promoting further notions of successful masculinity. This is logical and calculated construction of behavior and personae.⁷⁷⁴ The PUAs emulate Style, partly as a tribute, partly to learn from him, to get better in their own *Game*, and partly to surpass him in skill level.

The construction of social reality itself, and its deterioration and chaos – its liminality – is demonstrated in the text through the PUAs’ personas buckling under pressure, as well as Project Hollywood, as a small community of men representative of the wider underground community of pickup artists, falls apart amid in-fighting and personal betrayals, despite the best intentions of most of the men involved. Connected to this, is the construction of masculinity, which needs constant reflexivity if it is to stay on course. The men view this matter of factly, as changes in order to stay evolutionarily competitive⁷⁷⁵ and adaptable are important to survive in a postmodern competitive world.⁷⁷⁶

Style begins to be so popular that he has groupies. The *Game* has been learned so effectively, than to a certain degree, he does not need to *Game* to get results. This shows a tendency towards hyperinflation of achievement and constant virility in masculinity, traits which Kimmel discusses⁷⁷⁷ and that Bauman outlines in his ‘liquid self’ theory.⁷⁷⁸ The

⁷⁷¹ *ibid.* p. 216 – 218.

⁷⁷² Kimmel, M. 2004, 2006, 2008.

⁷⁷³ Strauss, N. 2005. pp. 246 and 247. “Here came the lecture. First Dustin; now Tom Cruise. I couldn’t understand it. What was wrong with learning how to meet women? That’s what we’re here for. It’s how the species survives. All I wanted was an evolutionary edge. So why not work at it and learn to do it well, like I’d done with everything else in my life? Who says you’re allowed to take lessons in motorcycle riding but not in interacting with women? I just needed someone to show me how to start the engine and shift to higher gears. And I wasn’t hurting anyone. No one was complaining after I slept with them, no one was being lied to, no one was being hurt. They wanted to be seduced. Everyone wants to be seduced. It makes us feel wanted.”

⁷⁷⁴ *ibid.* pp. 291 and 292. “‘It’s so genius,’ Papa was saying. ‘Tyler Durden has broken down everything Style does to a science. He calls it Stylemogg.’” “What’s that?” one of the students asked. “It’s a type of frame control,” Tyler Durden replied. A frame is an NLP term: It is the perspective through which one sees the world. Whoever’s frame—or subjective reality—is the strongest tends to dominate an interaction. “Style has all these really subtle ways of keeping control of the frame and getting people to qualify themselves to him. He makes sure that the focus is always on him. I’m writing a post about it.” “That’s awesome,” I said. Suddenly, Papa, Tyler Durden, and the students laughed. “That’s one of the things you do,” Papa said. “Tyler’s writing about that.” “What? I just said ‘awesome.’ That’s because I think it’s hilarious. Seriously, I can’t wait to read it.” They all laughed again. Evidently I was Stylemogg them. “See,” Tyler Durden said. “You’ll use curiosity as a frame to get rapport and make the other person lose social value. When you show approval like that, it makes you the authority and makes other people want to seek your validation. We’re teaching that.” “Shit,” I replied. “Now, every time I say something, people are going to think I’m running a Real Social Dynamics routine.” They all laughed again. And that’s when I realized that I was fucked: Everything Tyler Durden was writing about wasn’t anything I had learned in the community. That was all part of me and who I really was. And even though he had my intentions wrong—that was his frame, his way of looking at the world—he had my mannerisms down. He was taking the building blocks of my personality, giving them names, and turning them into routines. He was going to take my soul and spread it all over the Sunset Strip.”

⁷⁷⁵ *ibid.* p. 295. “...if you sit the average male down in front of anything halfway intriguing and explain to him that it has a system of rankings that he can get better at over time, he’ll become obsessed. Hence the popularity of video games, martial arts, Dungeons and Dragons, and the seduction community.”

⁷⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 294. “Among the required reading for all PUAs were books on evolutionary theory: *The Red Queen* by Matt Ridley, *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins, *Sperm Wars* by Robin Baker. You read them, and you understand why women tend to like jerks, why men want so many sexual partners, and why so many people cheat on their spouses. At the same time, however, you understand that the violent impulses most of us successfully repress are actually normal and natural. For Mystery, a Darwinist by nature, these books gave him an intellectual justification for his antisocial emotions and his desire to harm the organism that had mated with his woman. It was not a healthy thing.”

⁷⁷⁷ Kimmel, M. 2008.

⁷⁷⁸ Bauman, Z. 2001, 2003.

danger of being a social robot, if one focuses too much on learning Game to the detriment of everything else, is embedded in the text.⁷⁷⁹

(b) What is the author/his character at the end of the narrative? What kind of product/entity is he?

Strauss avoids being a “social robot” or so he claims. Society itself is to a great extent socially programmed, although the majority do not realize this programming. Learning Game exposes this, and PUAs uses such knowledge to their advantage in social interactions. At the start of the narrative, Strauss/Style is inadequate, clumsy and unsuccessful with women. By the end of the narrative, he is a master pickup artist, capable of seducing almost any woman. Due to the trauma in Project Hollywood, Strauss reconsiders – in the narrative at least – much of what he has done with his new “powers”, and he longs for a more intimate connection with a woman, he longs to feel “true love”. He comes out of the few years spent in the pickup community as a socially calibrated, wiser individual, successful in terms of his own path and masculinity, his business and writing, and his skillset when attracting women, having sex, being holistically fit and healthy, and social. From initially wanting to model and absorb the successful behaviors of PUA gurus, Strauss becomes examined and modeled himself by students and many of the RSD affiliates.⁷⁸⁰ He is a human, who knows how to bed women⁷⁸¹, and get past their “bitch shields”, their defenses against every man who approaches and tries to flirt with them.⁷⁸² He is an organically social person, who does not have to rely on alcohol or drugs, or previous social familiarity to be comfortable with talking to new women.⁷⁸³ He is able to control his “state” when out socially, that is his mental, emotional and physical feelings and reactions in any given moment. He namedrops for quick comparisons, cultural reference, to get a point across with just a name which evokes a whole range of images and associations such as style and social behavior, and so on. Strauss, using his intellect, becomes a more well-rounded person in general, functioning to a high degree in life, as a heterosexual male on top of things, living successfully – he has survived the community, has produced a well written book, his pickup skills have led to him becoming an even better interviewer and journalist, he is socially popular, is in a relationship with a beautiful woman, has had many incredible experiences, and is poised to do a lot more.

⁷⁷⁹ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 301. “[an MSN Group: Mystery’s Lounge post by Style] Internet newsgroups and the pickup lifestyle can give you so much—I know it’s given me so much—but it can take away a lot too. You can end up becoming a one-dimensional person. You start to think that everyone else around you is a social robot too and begin to read too much into his or her actions. The solution is to remember that the best way to pick up women is to have something better to do than to pick up women. Some guys give up everything—school, work, even girlfriends—to learn the game. But all these things are what make one complete and enhance one’s attractiveness to the opposite sex. So put your life back in balance. If you can make something of yourself, women will flock to you, and what you’ve learned here will prepare you to deal with them.”

⁷⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 303. “The three of them would be talking about me. “He’ll reposition his body to steer the conversation in his direction.” “He’ll leave at times to show scarcity.” “If you make a joke, he exaggerates it to steal the glory.” “If someone asks him to do a routine, he’ll say, In the field,’ so that it’s on his time and the person appreciates it more.” They weren’t criticizing me. They were trying to model me. Yet, oddly, they never hung out with me as friends. They just wanted to listen and absorb and take notes. It was dehumanizing. But then again, no one in that house seemed entirely human to begin with. I needed to get out of there.”

⁷⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 372. “I’ve never been a fan of one-night stands. Once you’ve gotten that close to someone, why throw it away afterward? I’m more a fan of ten-night stands: ten nights of great sex, each one getting steamier, wilder, and more experimental as two people grow more comfortable together and learn what turns each other on. So after I slept with each woman, I mixed and matched them like jellybeans.”

⁷⁸² *ibid.* p. 304 and 305. “This is what PUAs call a bitch shield. It was nothing personal, just a protective mechanism. I couldn’t let it faze me. I had to get rapport and show her I was human...” “I had responses now for nearly every challenge a woman could throw my way.”

⁷⁸³ *ibid.* p. 306. “I’m not a fan of drugs. Part of being a PUA is learning to control your own state, so you don’t need alcohol or drugs to have a good time.”

Sub-Auxiliary Questions

- How is masculinity defined through liminal struggles in the seduction community and 'The Game'?

The idea of postmodernity as a place with continuous struggles, not just for survival, but for self-identity, satisfaction, monetary security, and so on, is discussed by many theorists, such as Bauman⁷⁸⁴ and Giddens⁷⁸⁵. A flawless performance in the face of uncertainty and pressure, is what is necessary for men to be successful in social settings and in life itself.⁷⁸⁶ The sense of time out that the characters experience whilst living in Project Hollywood, affects the other aspect of their lives, such as finance and education.⁷⁸⁷ They get absorbed in the homosocial and inter-social dramas of the house, so that the PUAs often forget the reasons why they moved there in the first place. During and after these struggles, Strauss seems to acquiesce to the will of Lisa, which is unusual⁷⁸⁸ given the amount of learning and discipline he has mustered in order to become proficient at Game.⁷⁸⁹ Masculinity looks at change and at setbacks as opportunity for growth, and a test of the measure of one's self worth.⁷⁹⁰

- What are the gender roles and identifications most prevalent in the seduction community and 'The Game'?

Strauss and the other PUAs believe that all human interaction and relationships involve the same underlying patterns.⁷⁹¹ When Project Hollywood truly unravels, it is not the egos or misbehavior of men that does it, but the actions of a woman, Mystery's girlfriend Katya, who is scorned and so "outgames" everyone in the house.⁷⁹² Katya resists falling in love with Mystery, but once she does, delights in the role-play they invent that they are married.⁷⁹³ The fact that prior to discovering Game, Mystery was a magician and illusionist, is highly ironic. When Courtney Love moves into Project Hollywood, it is to escape the troubles in her life; this can be viewed as men rescuing women, or the damsel in distress trope.

Women are viewed as being multilayered and multifaceted, while men are too – however, the ideals of both sexes are quite fixed and rigid. A woman is sensual, a man is assertive and decisive, a woman is flexible, a man is determined and driven. The Mystery and Katya drama displays where postmodernism and traditionalism collide, or monogamy and polyamory, with pregnancy and abortion thrown into the mix.⁷⁹⁴ The character's actions in these scenarios and situations can often fall into familiar established patterns, although the context is one of alternative lifestyles.⁷⁹⁵ Tyler et al write on the psychology of people in social settings, and the ways in which selfhood is mutable, seemingly fixed around certain areas of interaction, yet flexible around others. Women are thought to like dates, and romance, and gestures, men are thought to just want sex. This is described as 'rocks versus gold' in the text⁷⁹⁶; contradictions, as in

⁷⁸⁴ Bauman, Z. 1991.

⁷⁸⁵ Giddens, A. 1991.

⁷⁸⁶ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 356. "...I was continuing my learning and growing process. I've lived and worked alone most of my life. I've never had a strong social circle or a tight network of friends. I've never joined clubs, played team sports, or been part of any real group prior to the community. Project Hollywood was bringing me out of my solipsistic shell. It was giving me the resources I needed to be a leader; it was teaching me how to walk the tightrope of group dynamics; it was helping me learn to let go of petty things like personal property, solitude, cleanliness, sanity, and sleep. It was making me, for the first time in my life, a responsible adult."

⁷⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 361. "I felt bad for her. She was allowing the problems of the house to distract her from the real-life issues she should have been dealing with. Perhaps we all were."

⁷⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 366. "My intention wasn't to use Lisa for sex. I knew I wanted to see her again, no matter what happened. I just wanted to get the whole sex thing over with so we could be normal together. She wouldn't be trying to keep anything from me; I wouldn't be trying to get something from her. I always hated the idea that sex is something a woman gives and a man takes. It is something that should be shared."

⁷⁸⁹ *ibid.* p. 363. "I excused myself and ran up to her."

⁷⁹⁰ *ibid.* p. 369. "Now that I knew she liked me, I had the confidence to push this thing to the end. If she still resisted, then she clearly had intimacy issues and I'd have to be the one to LJB her. [...] I was confused, but not disappointed—yet. A PUA must be willing to change or abandon any plan when confronted with the chaos and chance of reality."

⁷⁹¹ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 315 and 316. "All human relationships follow the same formula. Rapport equals trust plus comfort." "Interest plus attraction plus seduction equals sex."

⁷⁹² *ibid.* p. 321. "All those years of study, all those memorized routines and learned patterns of behavior, all those New Rock platform boots were no match for a woman scorned."

⁷⁹³ *ibid.* p. 325. "Mystery was right: Perception is reality."

⁷⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 329.

⁷⁹⁵ Tyler, T. R., Kramer, R. M. and John, O. P. 1999.

⁷⁹⁶ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 325 and 326. "There's a pattern the pickup artists have called rocks versus gold. It's a speech a man gives a woman he's dating when she stops having sex with him. He tells her that women in a relationship want rocks (or diamonds) while men seek gold. Rocks, for a woman, are wonderful nights out, romantic attention, and emotional connection. Gold for a man is sex. If you give a woman only gold or a man just rocks, neither will be satisfied. There must be an exchange. And Katya was giving Mystery the gold, but he wasn't giving her the rocks. He wasn't taking her out at all."

every human, are evident in the text, as for most of the book, Strauss writes about how women want sex even more than men, they are not really romantic⁷⁹⁷, they usually have the upper hand socially, and they are always in the Game.

- In what way does the success of 'The Game' indicate the disenfranchisement of men in postmodern neoliberal western culture?

Mystery, in the book, sees life merely as survival and replication, albeit with wonders and pleasures embedded within.⁷⁹⁸ When Katya has the abortion (which turns out to be fake – she was never pregnant), Mystery resents her for it, and hates her. The increased agency of women in the west, has led to a loss of power and decisiveness for men, especially when considering legality or taking child custody rights into account: the odds are stacked in women's favor. Mystery, however, acts childish and emotionally, instead of reasonably and calm with Katya. He tries to make her jealous, which backfires when she sleeps with someone else, the PUA Herbal who is living with them in Project Hollywood. He has another breakdown as a result.⁷⁹⁹ Mystery is his own victim – he is scared of the success that he wants so much. He does not call back VH1 after they send him a contract for a reality show. He tosses Katya's love for him in the trash, and pays the price when she leaves him. Men are seen to want to have balanced lives, and agency, yet are so confused by postmodernity's perpetual sense of imbalance and liminality, that it is difficult to hold onto any rhythm or sense of self for long. The only things that can be built, are temporary. The ways to combat this are to get healthy, fit, learn self-defense such as Krav Maga, learn business, get an education, get a social circle around you, and become as successful in all ways that modernity defines as successful – including biologically and sexually successful.⁸⁰⁰

- To what extent is masculinity hardwired by evolution, or performed and taught, as evinced in 'The Game'? The Game is in large part premised on evolutionary theory. While this is not explained in huge detail in the book, it is treated adequately. A rift between these theories, and the more traditional views of love and relationships, create a tension in the book, and in the lives of the community as Strauss portrays it. Masculinity is moldable, if considering the character arcs of many people in the narrative, yet there are some men who are "naturals" and do not need to learn any Game in order to be successful with women. Culturally, ideals of masculinity are enforced and maintained, as Kimmel's research on the history of the American male has demonstrated.⁸⁰¹ So there are cultural, biological/genetic and mental/cognitive angles to explore when answering this question. Although the PUAs have learned and been taught to view females and social dynamics as a logical and rational phenomenon, some of them cannot help but fall in love, such as Mystery with Katya, Herbal with Katya, and Strauss with Lisa. Tension between what their cognition says and what their emotions do cause havoc and confusion personally⁸⁰² and internally in these PUAs, and within the community itself, which carries on regardless.

- An evaluation of the success of gonzo journalism and autoethnography in 'The Game'. Neil Strauss' writing style is known for presenting a fly on the wall view to whichever situation he is in, whether hanging around with a celebrity for a few days, learning the art of disaster endurance with urban or outdoor survivalist preppers, or entering the underground pickup community. This style is said to have originated with Hunter S. Thompson. Strauss, while endeavoring to keep the book current and entertaining, also, through the very same methods, presents an account of events and people that is rich in authenticity and candor, containing many qualities of an ethnographic report. The report is not only concerning the seduction or pickup community, but women, and Strauss himself.⁸⁰³ On a macroscale, 'The Game' is concerned with social dynamics, how people interact and the hidden

⁷⁹⁷ *ibid.* p. 343 and 344. "'I wasn't a misogynist when I started this," Tyler replied. "But you get good and you start sleeping with all these women who have boyfriends, and you stop trusting women." A side effect of sarging is that it can lowers one's opinion of the opposite sex. You see too much betrayal, lying, and infidelity. If a woman has been married three years or more, you come to learn that she's usually easier to sleep with than a single woman. If a woman has a boyfriend, you learn that you have a better chance of fucking her the night you meet her than getting her to return a phone call later. Women, you eventually realize, are just as bad as men—they're just better at hiding it." "'I got hurt a lot when I first started picking up," he continued. "I'd meet an amazing girl I really liked, and we'd talk all night. She'd say she loved me and was so lucky to have met me. But then I'd fail one shit test, and she'd walk away and wouldn't even talk to me anymore. Everything we'd built up over the last eight hours would just go down the drain. So it hardened me.'"

⁷⁹⁸ Strauss, N. 2005. p. "...you know my mission in life: survive and replicate."

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 337. "Never underestimate your own capacity to care."

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 348.

⁸⁰¹ Kimmel, M. 1996, 2006.

⁸⁰² Strauss, N. 2005. p. 350. "There are men in this world who hate women, who do not respect them, who call them bitches and cunts. These are not PUAs. PUAs do not hate women; they fear them. Simply by defining oneself as a PUA—a title earned solely by the responses of women—one becomes doomed to derive his entire self-esteem and identity from the attention of the opposite sex, not unlike a comedian's relationship to audience members. If they don't laugh, you're not funny. So, as self-esteem defense mechanisms, some PUAs developed misogynist tendencies in the process of learning."

⁸⁰³ *ibid.* p. 354. "Sarging in Los Angeles, one develops a radar for women who are users. The less tactful among them will ask, within the first few minutes of a conversation, what kind of car you drive or what you do for work or what celebrities in the room you're friends with in order to

mechanisms and structures of power, attraction, status and success that operate in front of everyone's eyes, but are not necessarily taught or explained.

In this chapter, I have used close reading and narrative analysis to deeply analyze the first half of the material, and examined the research question and auxiliary questions of the dissertation through a broader reading and macro multiperspectival narrative analysis of the second half of the material.

In the follow chapter, I summarize the findings and make some remarks in conclusion, through a discussion of some of the main points in this dissertation.

determine your social ranking and how useful you might be to them. The more tactful ones don't have to ask questions: They look at your watch; they see how people respond to you when you talk, they listen for indicators of insecurity in your speech. These are the signals that PUAs call subcommunication." "A rich man doesn't have to tell you he's rich."

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I shall discuss the conclusions that were able to be reached during this study. Following this, I have suggestions for further research, and additional questions.

The questions of this dissertation are broad in scope and deeply probing. Due to work economic reasons, I tackled various parts of the book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists' with different levels of analysis, focusing on the elements that the questions entailed.

There is a deep analysis of approximately half of the book, using a form of close reading and narrative analysis, and links to the theories outlined in Chapter Three. This analysis finds meanings and aspects which apply to the book as a whole.

The second half of the book is examined through a broader reading and macro multiperspectival narrative analysis, the research question and auxiliary questions, also referencing the theorists discussed in Chapter Three, with a lighter use of narrative analysis. I approached the material in this way, to avoid saturation of materials.

Here, I first summarize the main themes and insights of the research that have been gleaned from the material, and contextualize Game within wider social frameworks. Then I discuss the findings of the analysis.

In this dissertation, I have looked at the phenomenon of Game, primarily using Neil Strauss' book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists'. To tackle the themes and issues that the text raises, I looked through the prisms of various theorists, using, among others, the works of Bauman, Giddens, Kimmel and Kress. My analysis of the text was done using narrative analysis. Other sources of information were used, when necessary, to provide context and explanation.

7.1 Summary of Themes/Positioning Game

I would argue that it is not just hegemonic dominant men, who make other men want to be alpha, but women too, in their complicity with the status quo (of power, sexual and social dynamics), despite protestations and exclamations to the contrary. As seen in evolutionary psychology and biology, these dynamics have biological, psychological, genetic and historical precedence. To that effect, there is a reality that is not being acknowledged by the mainstream, in terms of dealing with it and thus making things more clear or helpful for both men and women, when it comes to courtship, dating, expectations from men's and women's sides, and so on. Media and politics fame certain ways of doing things, then counter frame, so that, in order to be a 'good' person, 'moral' and 'liked by women', you 'must' agree with mainstream politically correct thought. To step outside this, is to risk derision, ostracization, or on the other spectra, great success socially, sexually and holistically. The latter is usually denied by mainstream thought, and frowned upon, yet covertly envied and admired. 'Attraction is not a choice', as Mystery says. Whether we 'like' it or not, these tactics do work, and to employ them does not make a man immoral, unjust, creepy, misogynistic or dangerous. He is only dangerous in the sense that he is competition for other men, and he does not have to marry or acquiesce to women, to provide for them materially, when he is competent at Game and has choice with regard to sexual partners.

It is undoubtedly true that hegemonic masculinity exists in certain respects and to certain extents, however, what is often overlooked is how women, either dominant or 'alpha female', often perpetuate or propagate this power play themselves. This means that there are a lot of men, who feel powerless, outside of the 'norm', who do not play by standards of success, who are 'nice' to women, and yet who do not receive any acknowledgement on a tangible level, from women, or from other men. To say that they are 'doing the right thing', when that thing clearly does not result in any measurable form of social success or happiness, is to be naive and also to have blinders on. There exists more double standards than the majority are willing to admit to. Also, masculinity as a concept can be fluid, but certain behaviors are empirically rewarded, and this should be acknowledged, as behavior that is prone to success.

To somehow 'punish' men who wish to learn pickup, with indignation, or pity, or derision, is to deny the other a chance to better himself⁸⁰⁴, in the same way as other men or women are given chances to better themselves in myriad of ways: through formal education, sports, gym training, makeup tips and articles in women's magazines on how to woo, and keep men, or 'bro talk' in bars over the best 'chat up lines' which never fail. It is also to deny that men and women do indeed respond to a certain set of criteria as a result of many factors, some of which being genetic impulses and evolutionary, survival and reproductive imperatives. Survival of the fittest, in a sense. Those who have the best attributes, are usually rewarded. After all, women usually want a man who 'knows what he is doing'. In this sense,

⁸⁰⁴ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 253. "According to the books I'd read on cold-reading, all human problems fall into one of three areas: health, wealth, and relationships, each of which has an inner and an outer component. For the past year and a half, we'd been focusing solely on relationships. Now it was time to get every cylinder in our lives firing."

aspiring to certain normative aspects of seduction, does not have to be inherently bad or disdained, especially if ‘it works’. In this sense, pickup can be seen as beneficial for men and for women. The former AFCs, through learning pickup and self-help techniques and practices such as martial arts, diet, exercise, and business methods, can lose their deficiencies in interacting with the opposite sex, each other, and themselves.

In the conclusion to the story, style and metaphors of Strauss’ book, we can see the commodization of emotion, sex, status, wealth power. These are easy targets, and are not necessarily absent from the book, nor hidden. However, I would say that there also exists humility, candor, a bravery and effort to reach beyond one’s own potential, and the (self) revelatory story of one man’s improving his life. Outside of discussion of the author, Strauss, is the book as a narrative, itself. It describes the possibility of holistic quantified improvements to a person. Material success, inner transcendence, popularity, sex, and adventure, are not just ‘for other people’. They can be for anyone, the book seems to say, if you put your mind towards it, or your Reticular Activation System (RAS), as RSD coaches. The ending, however, does seem a little too neat and tailored to the mainstream narrative; it is happy, and packaged in a sense. This could be to make it more palatable and acceptable for the moral majority – one that believes primarily in love, monogamy and heteronormativity.

‘The Game’ shows that seduction, and sex, can be a hobby, a recreation. Indeed, for many PUAs, the seduction can be more satisfying than the sex with the woman at the end. People now enjoy the pleasures of sex without the pressures of marriage. Sex is no longer expected to lead to marriage, even in the long term frame. Morality has shifted, and in my opinion, is not a basis or grounds for attack on Game, neither is religion.

Where disparity and conflicts of interest arise, is when business and consumerism enter the fray. That ‘The Game’ originated in America (although two of the most successful and original PUAs are Canadian, Mystery and Tyler Durden⁸⁰⁵), says a lot about marketization⁸⁰⁶, and responding to people’s needs, or perceived needs. There were no such dating or courtship guidebooks written or sold in Europe, for instance, prior to Strauss’ book becoming popular, except those marketed more towards women, and filled with Cosmopolitan-type advice, which was impractical and did not work.

Similar to Hendriks⁸⁰⁷, my understanding of the Game, as shown in Strauss’ book, is of a potentially positive and creative force that offers people practical “technologies” through which they can transform, discipline, and empower themselves.

What the men who turn to Game have in common, is a sense of frustration, of missing out, of inadequacy in life and/or loneliness. Ultimately, Game seems to help these people, often for good outcomes, and sometimes for bad. The fraying of social networks and bonding rituals of the community, can be corrosive to any progress that the PUAs make – a perpetuation of their problems with meeting girls, expect present in their interactions with men. Overall, if used wisely, the techniques of Game, and ideologies behind the best quality of the material, are a positive resource.

7.2 Summary of Analysis

Neil Strauss uses and shows a successful and powerful masculinity status in the dating arena with women, in his book “The Game”, through finding out about Game and realizing that attraction techniques can be learned, goes about entering the secret society of pickup artists he reads about online.⁸⁰⁸ His success is championed by the community, when he writes in the New York Times about pickup, their response is positive overall. Through seminars and Project Hollywood, men want to be him, consider him a pillar of the community, and a role model. He achieves a level of success with women that mainstream men dream about. Strauss also improves other areas of his life, such as finances, health and fitness, and overall sociability, including friendship networks. The Game is shown not to only be of use in attracting women, but in creating a lifestyle and standard of living for oneself.

This is shown throughout the narrative, as the author travels worldwide, has access to resources and information, often being directly taught techniques by the gurus who invented them. At other times, work is done directly to him, such as

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid.* p. 220. “There was one fledgling PUA, in particular, whom Papa bonded with: a twenty-two-year-old Canadian who had discovered the pickup scene when his mother stumbled across a seduction website. He called himself Tyler Durden, after the seditious character in Fight Club. And like a virus or a demagogue (choose your simile), he would eventually change the course of the community and everyone in it. He was a philosophy student at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario.”

⁸⁰⁶ *ibid.* p. 221. “And therein lay his appeal: Tyler Durden made seduction seem playful and subversive—unlike, say, Speed Seduction, which required homework, rote memorization, and even meditation exercises.”

⁸⁰⁷ Hendriks, E. C. 2012

⁸⁰⁸ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 230. “I’d thought my whole life that it was something one was born with. However, the whole community was predicated on the idea that it was something people could learn.”

when he attends NLP and hypnosis sessions. Similarly, he has the time and money to get vocal lessons, lessons for posture, dancing lessons, singing lessons, to practice sports such as Krav Maga, gym and surfing, and to both attend and host pickup seminars.

People listen to him, and he mediates much of the story's characters through dramatic episodes, usually appearing as a voice of calm and reason, when others are not.

Norms of successful masculinity constructed in the text, by addressing mental and emotional health, in the face of life's setbacks. It is a continuous theme in the text, embodied primarily in the form of Mystery and his grandiose plans, and emotional breakdowns. Project Hollywood is conceived, in part, to motivate the men to keep building momentum in their lives.⁸⁰⁹

The author, as Style, becomes a master pickup artist (mPUA), and is literally worshipped by men globally.⁸¹⁰ He portrays himself as an obsessed person with Game for the first two years, yet mild compared to others. The obsession allows him to gain proficiency and skill. He is joyful at having broken through the 'matrix' or 'code' of human interaction, to have found the keys to women's heads, hearts and legs. Other gurus, devise similar and different models of seduction, expanding upon or evolving patterns. Strauss, as Style, combines all of these methods, and invents some of his own through epiphanies and testing in the field. Tyler Durden enters the picture, and takes things further. Strauss, due to being in the community before Durden, is quite critical towards the methods Durden and his company RSD use, although they are initially based quite heavily on material from the Mystery Method, Speed Seduction, and Style's own patterns.⁸¹¹

Through exposing the community to the wider world, adding to and enriching the well of knowledge that PUAs can draw from, and helping through friendship and adventures some of the key players of the pickup community, Strauss positions himself as a linchpin and alpha in his personal life and in the arena of the attraction 'sciences'.

Masculinity is defined through liminal struggles in the seduction community and 'The Game' constantly. The characters are faced with dilemmas when they travel, existential and emotional crises, the frustrations of learning new skills and the joys of successfully executing and performing pickups, thereby confirming their masculinity and reaping the social and sexual benefits of this success. Through these successes, masculinity is confirmed for individual pickup artists.

The gender roles and identifications most prevalent in the seduction community and 'The Game' are primarily the alpha male – seen as the pinnacle of masculinity, one that is 'right' and ideal, and one who leads, is strong, is successful, is popular and loved by men and is desired by women, is a model of human maleness that is identified as being the one to emulate and aim towards, bolstered by evolutionary theory and the pickup artist community. Modelling themselves on alpha males, while learning systematically the routines, theories and technologies that work in attracting women, the men in 'The Game', while initially unable to compete with 'naturals' or other 'successful' men – either businessmen, movie or music icons, or sports heroes – find themselves, through learning, hard work and commitment, able to level the playing field in social dynamics. The women in 'The Game' are varied, some are party girls, others are celebrities, some are intelligent, and powerful. Like the idiosyncrasies shown in the male characters, the female characters that are described in detail in the book, are compelling and interesting.

The success of 'The Game' indicates the disenfranchisement of men in postmodern neoliberal western culture, by describing the various schools of pickup, and the ways in which men are eager to learn the theories and techniques taught by these schools. The various trends in the seduction community can be seen to respond to varying needs of the 'market' of men who wish to learn how to attract women, or get better at attraction.⁸¹² These trends find certain weaknesses in men and exploit them, when the company is scrupulous and not offering value. In the best circumstances, companies, along with forums and lairs, offer value and expertise, and support for men to learn the arts of attraction, and improve their lives in a general balanced way. That men need to learn these things at all, points to a lack of education culturally, within families, schools, media and society to teach men how to interact with, and attract women.

⁸⁰⁹ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 225. "...we need to design a social environment with people to motivate me—something like Sweater's place in Australia. We can all motivate each other. While I was at the hospital, I took a lot of notes on this idea. I showed them to my psychiatrist. Even he was impressed. I'm calling it Project Hollywood."

⁸¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 226. "One of our former students, Supastar, a ruggedly handsome teacher from South Carolina, had recently posted, "When I die and go to pickup heaven, Style will be there waiting for me because he is a pickup god."

⁸¹¹ *ibid.* p. 229. "Human interaction to him was a program. Behavior was determined by frames and congruence and state and validation and other big-chunk psychological principles. And he wanted to be the Wizard of Oz: the little guy behind the curtain, pulling the strings that made everyone around him think he was a big and powerful master of the realm."

⁸¹² *ibid.* p. 232. "There were trends in the community. Ross Jeffries and Speed Seduction had ruled the seduction boards when I arrived over a year ago. Then Mystery Method took over, followed by David DeAngelo and cocky funny. Now, Tyler Durden and Papa were on the rise." "These were trends that had nothing to do with females and everything to do with male ego."

Women have had such advice for decades in magazines, yet until the advent of Game, there were no such avenues of information for men. Popular wisdom held that some men have it, some do not. Through discovering patterns of attraction, PUAs revealed that such mainstream groupthink is false – attraction can be learned as any skillset in life. With women's greater agency in the west, there is the pressure on men to keep up, and to relate to women. What women say they want, and what they actually want, are two different things; men are spoon-fed 'white knight' and 'nice guy' fantasies by liberal media, yet 'in the field' to behave such a way towards women will not make them attracted. This disparity adds to men's frustrations and fuels a sense of being left behind while society 'progresses'. To keep up in a liminal, technologically advanced, liquid modernity, men must take the curtain behind the romantic charade back, and reveal the cold truths of evolutionary dynamics that men and women still operate on, the idea that humans still have the same emotional circuitry as in our distant cave men past, despite technological progress and overpopulation. In fact, many of Game's architecture has been created by women, to screen potential partners, and has necessarily got more complex when human population has ballooned, while still the underlying principles remain the same. Learning Game in 'The Game' is a way for men to combat and adapt to such information, especially if they have not been gifted with striking looks or physiques, or inherited wealth.

The ambivalence of postmodernity, according to Bauman⁸¹³, results in cognitive dissonance. We notice phenomena such as speed-dating, long-distance relationships made possible through technology and online services such as Tinder and Skype. Men are constantly worried about being redundant, physically, socially and existentially.⁸¹⁴ They must reassess their identities in terms of its relation with women, Giddens writes.⁸¹⁵ Men used to find their identity through work. With a postmodern fragmented society which in the west is more or less egalitarian between the sexes, this is no longer the case for men, who, according to Giddens, derive a large part of their self-identity⁸¹⁶ through the experience of the polarity, oppositional or relational contexts with women. Giddens describes sex as a never ending search⁸¹⁷, this can linked with options for consumption in a globalized market economy. Interestingly, Giddens, like many feminist academics perhaps, believes that seduction is no longer necessary⁸¹⁸ in postmodernity, as equality between the sexes in this regard has been mostly achieved. Clearly, this view is mistaken, and grossly misguided, contradictory, simplified, uninformed and general – although it is interesting to contemplate. This raises the question of sheltered and socially passive academics who perhaps side with feminism⁸¹⁹ or act as 'white knights', while not being aware of, or not investigating adequately, social dynamics in the field; in other words, indiscriminately taking "women's side" without a truly informed objective knowledge of the dynamics involved. Questions of hating one's own sex, or wanting in an unbalanced manner the approval of women, might in some cases be apt to ask.

Neil Strauss has said in interviews that if meeting women were as easy and simple as approaching someone, saying hello, telling them your name, and asking them to like you, he would not have had to write the book.⁸²⁰

Men and women are different, though to varying extents and in different contexts. What heterosexual men and women want from each other when it comes to sexual encounters, intimacy and "dating", is also varied. Both sexes can have problems with intimacy.

⁸¹³ Bauman, Z. 2004. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. p. 124 and 128. "Continuous ambivalence, results in cognitive dissonance." "[There is the constant] fear [of being] dumped to the scrapyard."

⁸¹⁴ Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. p. 7. "...we are [...] moving from the era of pre-allocated 'reference groups' into the epoch of 'universal comparison', in which the destination of individual self-constructing labors is endemically and incurably undermined..."

⁸¹⁵ Giddens, A. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. p. 60. "For men self-identity was sought after in work, and they failed -- we always have to add, by and large -- to understand that the reflexive project of self involves an emotional reconstruction of the past in order to project a coherent narrative towards the future. Their unconscious emotional reliance upon women was the mystery whose answer they sought in women themselves; and the quest for self-identity became concealed within this unacknowledged dependence."

⁸¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 84 and 85. "The modern sexual adventurer has rejected romantic love, or uses its language only as persuasive rhetoric. His dependence upon women, therefore, can only be validated through the mechanics of sexual conquest. More than other men, one could argue, the womanizer spots the connections between sexuality, intimacy and the reflexive construction of self-identity; but he is in thrall to women rather than able to meet them as independent beings capable of giving and accepting love. The womanizer appears as a figure who 'loves them and leaves them'. In fact, he is quite unable to 'leave them': each leaving is only a prelude to another encounter."

⁸¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 82. "Such men love women, although they cannot love any particular woman alone."

⁸¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 83. "Womanizers today [...] are seducer in an era in which seduction has virtually become obsolete..." "Seduction' has lost much of its meaning in a society in which women have become much more sexually 'available' to men than ever before, although -- and this is crucial -- only as more equal. Womanizing reflects this fundamental change at the same time as it grates against it." "But what price victory when victory is so easy." "What is there to savour when the other is not only willing, but perhaps eager for sexual experience?"

⁸¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 83 and 84. "The assertion of power in seduction, whereby women are overcome or symbolically 'killed', might seem on the face of things to become all the more challenging when the individual confronts someone who asserts her equality. But female sexual equality, as Graham Hendrick discovered, dissolves the age-old division between the virtuous and the corrupt, or degraded, woman." "The womanizer of today is not someone who cultivates sensual pleasure, but a thrill-seeker in a world of open sexual opportunities. The thrill of the pursuit provides the high -- but the high tends later to become the fix." "Womanizers maintain that necessary 'potential space' by means other than respect for the partner. Their ability to 'walk away' is achieved through the anticipation of the next potential sexual encounter. They are often masters of the rhetoric of romantic love, but are unable to produce from it an emotionally coherent narrative of self."

⁸²⁰ Doreian, R. 2011. *Regrets of a Pickup Artist*.

To what extent masculinity is hardwired by evolution, or performed and taught, as evinced in ‘The Game’ – The tensions and conflations between innate attractive skills, romance, traditional courtship models, and Game, are contested throughout the text. For much of the book, Strauss is happy to be a member of a secret club, with secret magic tricks that can woo women into his bed. Midway through the tale, he is having a fluctuating change of heart, due to other areas of his life being neglected, and erratic behavior of some of his PUA friends. The theories and techniques being used by the pickup community negate and contradict much of the mainstream narrative of ‘what works’ in interactions between men and women. The counterintuitive patterns and gambits elicit favorable responses from women, that feminism or politically correct media and politics say should not work. So, the media brands it misogynistic and predatory, or creepy and wrong. This is a safe narrative and means that the mainstream does not have to think too deeply or examine itself, perhaps not wanting to see some uncomfortable truths. To the extent that these techniques work, there is a validation of evolutionary theory, and the responses that are hardwired into women from humanity’s past, encoded in genes. That it is taught to pickup students, who usually do not have these skills innately, and who go on to emulate alpha males, and get success with women themselves, leads to a difficult to find answer. More social, psychological, biological and genetic research will have to be done, in order to find out if men can affect their genes enough to be congruent and internalize fully the new mindsets and behavioral models that are necessary to possess in order to be successful with women and as male humans. The theorists in Chapter Three write about masculinity and gender, as something that is culturally taught. ‘The Game’ and the pickup community base their successful models on evolutionary research, and field testing of techniques in the real world. In the book ‘The Game’, it appears somewhat to be a combination of both. The internalizing of these qualities, is where more research, and more pickup material, can aim towards in the future.

The success of gonzo journalism and autoethnography in ‘The Game’ is significant. The book ushered Game and the pickup community into mainstream media and thought. Although it occasionally surfaces here and there, such as with the recent Julien Blanc from RSD scandal, Game is usually restricted to small articles in men’s magazines, or fitness media. Feminism has labelled it as ‘wrong’, a blanket reaction that neglects to delve or investigate deeper into the material and truly understand it.

The success of the book itself was and is significant. Seduction companies bloomed after it became an instant bestseller, there were options for rights to a movie version, Strauss and Mystery, among others, were asked on national and international media shows and publications for interviews and demonstrations, Strauss and Mystery launched successful companies, websites, and other media ventures.

The success, then, of the gonzo journalistic style and ethnographic exploration of the pickup community in ‘The Game’, is that it engages readers to a large degree, people want to know if the story really happened the way that it did, they want to know more about the characters, about the lifestyle, and about the techniques. Men want to know how to perform such techniques, and if they really work. Women want to know what the techniques are, and usually say that they would never work on *them*.

Honesty and authenticity is rendered clearly in the text, giving the reader a visceral and genuine view of events, thoughts, and feelings. It is akin to a journal, similar in that the text gives the impression that, while it is undoubtedly stylized and even experimental at times, there has not been much editing or softening of thoughts. This is a paradox, when considering the narrative that overtakes the book from the second half onwards, where Strauss is debating the positivity and wisdom of Game, and leaning towards behaving and desiring a more traditional type of connection with a woman, so much so that he asks his girlfriend to be, Lisa, out on a traditional date, which is considered to be an ‘AFC’ move. This changeability and contradictory behavior cannot be criticized too heavily, however, as when considering the ethnographic qualities of the text, it lends more credibility to the events, as people do fluctuate and change their minds constantly, in small or large ways. When considering the latter half of the book, it may be worthwhile to ask if Strauss has tweaked the moral issues and simplified them, in order to make the text more palatable to mainstream readers.

In Strauss’ book ‘The Game’, the Game metaphor highlights the similarities between capitalism and the methods of seduction employed by the PUAs, both of which rely on a strategy of rationally maximizing labor and gain within a complicated social field. Weber⁸²¹ refers to this as “the disenchantment of the world” through capitalism’s rationalism and bureaucratic imposition on basic problems in life. Seduction, an area which is not often considered by academic discourse, is considered by mainstream narrative to be outside of rational discussing and control. Despite this, dating and attracting people is increasingly subject to market forces, rationalization, optimization and quantization. It is being

⁸²¹ Weber, M. 1992.

looked at scientifically and logically, in scattered academic studies, especially within the evolutionary sciences and psychology, within self-help literature and in western culture and media.

To be a man in western postmodernity, is to strive to be an alpha, or to be considered a failure in some capacity⁸²², if you fall short of that ideal. The alpha is the man who gets the girls. By trying to emulate alphas, PUAs can reap the rewards, not just in their dating and sex lives, but in their friendships, work, business, education, health regimes, and more. It has both good and bad sides, as do any vital and serious life skills.⁸²³ Lairs or competitive micro communities such as Project Hollywood may be difficult to keep together, due to the nature of the people, behavior and pursuits⁸²⁴ of those who live in such arrangements, however, the overall premise of Game, separate from this, is worthwhile as a consideration for an individual who needs to overhaul or 'pimp' their life, to reach their potential. This recalls Bauman's discussion of Weber's 'instrumental rationalization', where the value-rational is another type of goal-oriented action. Present day consumerism is about desire, not needs.⁸²⁵ People relate to one another based on value and utility, whether it is consumer based, or survival and replication based. The ultimate goal of men is survival and replication, and this is achieved most definitively through being an alpha male. Men tend to need to lead in social interactions with women, as in dancing for example – women are by and large attracted to dominant, assertive men who have a masculine polarity, not men who think precisely as they themselves do. However, at the fundamental level, a man cannot 'trick' a woman into being attracted to him, either she is attracted, or she is not. It is her choice. In this instance, the 'new man' movement of the late 1980s and 1990s, did not help men to be attractive to women, although it was believe that by getting in touch with their 'feminine side', that that would be the result.

In a hypercapitalist and consumerist society, rational choice becomes a way of pursuing gratification while avoiding consequences. Men must stay the best, most fit, most relevant and most powerful, at all times. Keeping up is its own rewards – there is no 'final' version of a successful man. Men must keep on improving or die, according to Bauman and attraction companies such as RSD. To a large extent, procrastination is a cultural practice.⁸²⁶ Alpha men stand out against such indecisiveness, automatically making them more attractive to women. Bonds and partnerships are things to be consumed in postmodern liminality, liquid life has premises such that if people assume commitments as temporary they will act as such⁸²⁷, towards some version of autonomy of society.

Despite this, friendship is a huge theme in the book, that of homosocial bonding between two heterosexual men. Strauss and Mystery are considered by many in the arts and in the seduction community as bone fide geniuses. That Strauss was constantly looking out for his friend Mystery, while his life improved, shows the value of friendship, in terms of not leaving someone behind, and wanting to raise them up to a better awareness of themselves.⁸²⁸

Through the example of Strauss' book, we can notice that contemporary seduction and attraction techniques and communities attempts to rationalize desire, which has until recently been historically described as being outside of purely intellectual and strategic understanding. By viewing and approaching the world this way, there can be a tendency for people – for practitioners of Game, to rationalize the entire social world, defining everyone within it as being conducive to the persons' utility or value. Having said this, it is stressed that this occurs anyway, on emotional, subconscious and evolutionary/genetic levels within each individual. The Game merely brings such knowledge and "truth" out into the open, which contrasts significantly to how the majority of mainstream society thinks or believes the case to be. The world of human interaction, whether overtly or subtly, is mainly predicated on how gains are

⁸²² Bauman, Z. 2000. p. 61. "[...] 'light capitalism' is 'value-obsessed'."

⁸²³ Strauss, N. 2005. p. 389 and 390. "One of the problems with the PUA community was that it presented inflexible standards of behavior that men were supposed to follow in order to win a woman. And chief among them was the idea of being an alpha male. The result was a bunch of men who'd been kicked around most of their lives trying to act like their former bullies, leading to immature behavior such as Mystery's." "Strip away the community bond and the seduction business interests that united us, and what was left? Six guys chasing after a limited subset of available women. Wars have been fought, world leaders shot, and tragedies wrought by males claiming territorial rights over the opposite sex. Perhaps we'd just been too blind to see that Project Hollywood was doomed from the start by the very pursuit that had brought it together."

⁸²⁴ *ibid.* p. 227. "Now that I was mastering this whole girl thing, I needed to put the other pieces of my life back in balance. All the sarging was starting to scramble my brain. I was becoming too dependent on female attention, allowing it to be my sole reason for leaving the house besides food. So I told Mystery that I was going to cut back on the whole sarging thing. I was currently seeing eight girls in L.A. My dance card was full. There was Nadia and Maya and Mika and Hea and Carrie and Hillary and Susanna and Jill. They had needs, and there were no strings attached. They knew I was seeing other women. And they were probably seeing other guys. I didn't know, didn't care, and didn't ask. All that mattered was that when I called them, they came. And when they called me, I came. Everybody came."

⁸²⁵ Bauman, Z. 2000. p. 76. "...postmodern society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers [...] [they are] guided by seduction without norms."

⁸²⁶ *ibid.* p. 156 and 163.

⁸²⁷ *ibid.* p. 212. "...so that one can work in the world, rather than being worked by it, one needs to know how the world works."

⁸²⁸ *ibid.* p. 394 and 395. "Tears began leaking out of my eyes. I couldn't help it. I turned and faced the wall so Herbal and Papa wouldn't see. The tears ran faster. Despite all of Mystery's flaws, I still cared about the guy. After two years in the seduction community, I still didn't have a girlfriend, but for some reason I had bonded with this big blubbering genius."

maximized: Richard Dawkins the evolutionary biologist discusses⁸²⁹ this memetic response of altruism conflicting with exploitation, yet it turns out, that the two are the same thing, albeit expressed differently in different situations. The commoditization and objectification of people and life, lends itself to Game terminology and efficiency of language and behavior, there is a directness and bluntness about the terms ‘target’, ‘obstacle’, ‘sets’ and so on. One-upmanship, the drive to be better than or at least as good as everyone else, drives postmodern liminal society, and from this the seduction community is not immune. Neither is it immune to gossip, fear, insecurity, manipulation and opportunism, as evinced by Project Hollywood.⁸³⁰ The seduction community demonstrates, at the micro level, how the rationalization of social life under capitalism has been extended to social life down to our most intimate desires, an aspect discussed by Foucault and his theories of technology of the self.⁸³¹ Human relationships under capitalism other people exist for our use.⁸³²

Bauman contends⁸³³ that the planet is full, and that now there are local solutions to global problems. Waste and waste disposal, all that these terms entail, is of grave concern for Bauman, who cites modern discontent as arising from preoccupations with individualization, consumerist culture, thirst for information, George Steiner’s ‘casino culture’, and liquid modernity itself. There has been a move to a ‘light’ and ‘liquid’ software-based modernity, with a fluid state of life-politics and human togetherness. Bauman describes five of the main orthodox narratives of the human condition as they are now in ‘liquid modernity’: emancipation, individuality, time/space, work and community. Society is under constant change, uncertainty and ambivalence, nothing is given in advance or is self-evident, and everything is a series of individual tasks.⁸³⁴ Characteristics of liquid society that Bauman outlines include post-Panoptical power-relations in the electronic/digital instantaneous age, nomadism, travelling light (in terms of identity), the disintegration of the social network (family, friends), new techniques of power using disengagement and the art of escape as major tools, in which the frailty and falling apart of human bonds helps power to do such a job in the first place.

Foucault⁸³⁵ discusses how men have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality in society. The rise of the female gaze underlines this. Giddens⁸³⁶ maintains that revolutionary hopes have been pinned on sexuality. He describes a ‘pure relationship’⁸³⁷ where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, and for what can be derived and experienced by each person from sustained association with another. These associations are continued as long as it is considered by both people to provide enough satisfaction(s) for each individual to stay within the arrangement. He describes romantic love as a cultural invention, although he writes of it normatively.⁸³⁸ Linking Giddens’ writing to ‘The Game’, Giddens describes a ‘plastic sexuality’ that is decentralized, more open towards polyamory, and freed from the restrictions of reproduction. This frees men and women, emancipating them from the family, arising due to limits of family size, economics, and new reproductive and contraceptive technologies. Giddens discusses the ‘emotional abyss’ that has opened between men and women, while intimacy can be oppressive or radicalizing⁸³⁹, the idea here being quite idealistic.

Wanting to know more about Game, and understanding it, opens the possibility for dialogue between the sexes, which leads to the possibility for greater egalitarianism, empathy and cooperation.

The positives from Game are numerous, both in the text, and in practice. If one can internalize the lessons and rely on one’s own personality⁸⁴⁰, and just use canned routines as training wheels, ultimately working on oneself to develop a

⁸²⁹ Dawkins, R. 2006. *The Selfish Gene*.

⁸³⁰ Strauss, N. 2005. pp. 376 – 382.

⁸³¹ Foucault, M. 1984, 1986.

⁸³² Strauss, N. 2005. p. 384 and 385. “Along the way, I had gotten caught up in the social network and bonding rituals of the community—in the idea that we were the supermen of the future, the smoothest who would inherit the earth from the strong, the sole owners of the skeleton key to the female mind. I had moved in with these guys because I thought we had all the answers. I imagined working together to bring all the other areas of our lives up to a new plateau, beyond just women. I hoped we would be greater than the than the sum of our parts.”

⁸³³ Bauman, Z. 2000, 2004.

⁸³⁴ Bauman, Z. 2000. p. 8. “...the remoteness and unreachability of systemic structure, coupled with the unstructured, fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics, change that condition in a radical way and call for a rethinking of old concepts that used to frame its narratives. Like zombies, such concepts are today simultaneously dead and alive.”

⁸³⁵ Foucault, M. 1984. *Power*. p. 237.

⁸³⁶ Giddens, A. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*.

⁸³⁷ *ibid.* p. 58.

⁸³⁸ *ibid.* p. 2. “Romantic love presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself.”

⁸³⁹ *ibid.* p. 3. “[Intimacy also implies] wholesale democratizing of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere.” “The transformation of intimacy might be a subversive influence upon modern institutions as a whole. For a social world in which emotional fulfilment replaced the maximizing of economic growth would be very different from that which we know at present.”

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 397. “It had finally happened: The Sunset Strip was sarged out. The community had grown large and reckless; too many competing businesses were teaching the same material. And we had saturated more than just Los Angeles. PUAs in San Diego, Montreal, New York, San Francisco, and Toronto had been reporting the same problem lately: They were running out of fresh girls to sarge.”

solid inner and outer Game, then social stagnation can be avoided. In other words, as shown in Strauss' book, Game is known to exist by many women now, so it is not enough to simply learn some lines and some moves, which they may have already heard many times before, to the point of 'saturation of the market' in many locations. Instead, a holistic approach to life, self-help, health, education and social circles, when done in a balanced and measured way, it can be beneficial for all involved, for a man in postmodern, liminal, neoliberal, capitalist, fragmented, consumerist, liquid society and life, to find the alpha within.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

During the writing of this dissertation, I had many ideas and areas which I would like to further explore. The questions posed in the dissertation can also be investigated in more depth. The following are a few of these key words, concepts and questions that I feel are legitimately interesting, and would provide a way to supplement and build on this dissertation.

In the context of Game/the seduction community:

Fragmentation of society

Models of success

Scripts of successfulness

Social hierarchies and how they define their parameters

How people act on their skills, acquire skills, to succeed

Popularity of self-help

Personal branding: Success and selling yourself

Gonzo journalism. Credibility, accountability and accessibility. Personal journey, what is appealing, normative assumptions.

Market as a place where people need guidance for a holistically successful life

Being popular because something is popular

How has 'The Game' been a success? How does it promote personal power? In what ways are the processes, texts and results received by the mainstream society?

Masculine identification

Feminist expectations and misandry versus innate, normative and non-normative masculinities/attainability of equality between the sexes

Mentoring role of PUA gurus

Notions of 'otherness'

Liminality in the current state of masculinity

Culture of dating in postmodernity

Revenge of the nerds/rise of programmers/start-up companies as new cultural idols with social capital

Use of persuasion

Beneficial aspects and effects of practicing Game

How Game has been used by government officials and organizations

Game in mainstream society – prominence and proliferation

How the media has covered and reacted to Game

How social skills are taught

Performativity of masculinity/avatar building

Fear of Missing Out

MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way) movement/manosphere

Related phenomenon such as Tucker Max

Crises of legitimation and representation

How the seduction community has become the seduction industry

The failure or death of romantic love

Equality between the sexes in the dating arena – including the effect of socially conditioned beliefs

The community, companies, and lairs of aspiring PUAs

Idea (controversial) of beta academics/'white knights' siding with feminism

Success of PUAs – millionaires/consumer culture

Game as more than a cult

Mainstream use of PUA terms now, such as alpha, neg, beta

In depth research could also be done for the following:

A more thorough examination – and refutation, if necessary – of feminist viewpoints could be in order. However, due to the prevalence of these views in the mainstream, the politically correct climate (in both good and bad ways) and groupthink of the moral majority, this side of the story may not need to be expanded upon as much.

An examination of the ways in which the seduction community practices and has been introduced in Nordic countries and in Finland, would be of great interest. The consequences and repercussions this may have in terms of social groups, traditional Finnish values, politics (of personal, sexual and beyond) and the ways in which it is marketed, deemed effective, and different from other nations/areas, could be investigated.

Academic investigation of seduction companies such as RSD, Real Social Dynamics, and their popularity. Interviews with RSD founder Owen Cook aka Tyler Durden, and Julien Blanc, who caused worldwide controversy (and brought pickup into the limelight again, in mainstream media and even politics) with a video he posted online in a humorous way in late 2014, and who was subsequently banned from entering many countries, due to being taken out of context, misinterpretation, attacked by feminists and male apologists, and mainstream thought, would be interesting.

A review and further investigation of the bootcamp I attended in Helsinki 2012 with Mystery and Beckster PUA. Interviews with Beckster and Mystery.

A review of a coaching call I did in early 2013 with Bravo PUA, aka Stephen Grosch (a former student of Strauss' and Mystery), and interview.

An interview with Neil Strauss, on Game, and on his new forthcoming book, 'The Truth', which is about relationships. Interviews with Finnish PUAs, and their students, or groups, such as RSD Helsinki, on Facebook.

Reviews of the RSD Free Tour lecture I shall attend in December 2015 with RSD Max, and of a seminar I shall attend in August 2015 with RSD Julien (Julien Blanc, in his apparent last 'world tour' of talks with RSD, before he goes on to doing other, related things).

An investigation of Stylelife, the company that Strauss founded after writing 'The Game', its website, materials, videos, online forum.

Other online forums of seduction companies and pickup gurus.

Also, the material, and the Game itself, could yield surprising results when examined from a multidisciplinary approach, and a different analysis from the current work, for example by using discourse analysis.

From the social sciences angle, closer readings of Bourdieu (with his concepts of habitus, capital and field being ripe for application in an analysis of 'The Game', Game, or the seduction community), Kress on the media aspects (and medium as the message), Habermas, Foucault (with his Technology of the Self and biopower) and Giddens.

7.4 Additional Questions Concerning 'The Game'

- How and why has 'The Game' been a success in multimodes and platforms?
- How does the text 'The Game' promote personal power? How is success in masculinity promoted and performed?
- Is there more than one type of successful masculinity on display?
- How is success defined in the text?
- Is masculinity presented as an ideal type with fluctuation within it, or just one successful masculinity with norms and ideals?

7.5 Concluding Remarks

Successful Masculinity: In Search of the Alpha Within, stuck me as an apt title for this dissertation, due to the journey of Neil Strauss in the book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists', and also it is apt when considering the desires, needs and wants of most normative heterosexual men.

If the ultimate goal in life is survival and replication, a more nuanced version of this is to become holistically successful.

The book 'The Game', and the Game itself, including the seduction community, lairs and companies, make for very interesting and rich social phenomena: moreso, in my opinion, as one of their greatest passions is understanding human interactions, behavior and relations, similar to social scientists. I believe the topic is suitable for PhD studies, as there are so many important elements contained within it, and branching outwards. Analysis of the community, discovering evolutionary precedents and links between taken-for-granted social concepts, discourse analysis and social narrative analysis of 'The Game' and PUAs, group analysis of phenomena, are but some of the ways this research could be taken farther.

I cut more from this dissertation than what was left in. Examples of sections of text and analysis cut include topics like the men's rights movement, media, men's studies, self-development and improvement, culture, creativity, postmodernity, advertising and market economy, critical reaction to 'The Game', culture and identity, a fuller account of liminality, love, commitment, gender, class, resistance, causality, seperability of man from nature, ambivalent love and identity, and more. In deciding what to cut and what to leave in, I referred to the text – if it was an immediately apparent, easily linkable and graspable concept which connected to the text, I left it in the dissertation. Due to tight time restrictions, the finished piece is a lot farther in form than I would like. My motivation is to have it be more in-depth, more polished, and finely tuned. All along the way, this piece wanted to be larger, as I saw connections and got excited by the academic research process.

This dissertation has been ambitious and expansive, in attempting to ask and answer questions that link a variety of academic disciplines and social fields, theories and topics. The work has been multi-perspectival, recalling mesosomatic research. There is an oscillating focus on the micro and the macro. In discussing the book 'The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists', it has been necessary to also discuss the pickup and seduction community, Game, and its various concepts and legitimization – mainly by contextualizing it within and in relation to academia and society, while considering carefully the ways in which to discuss and present research, views and indeed the whole concept of Game, in a sincere, intellectually serious and significant manner.

The process had a tendency to spiral outwards as well as inwards, more connections and angles were found and realized continuously. I believe this is a topic that is ripe for further academic research and exploration, and integral to further understanding of human interaction.

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